

A Curriculum Guide to

***How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* and  
*The Call of the Bully***

By Scott Starkey

**About the Books**

***How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying***

Rodney Rathbone is a self-admitted coward. Things scare him, and he can't help it. So, naturally he's terrified when he moves to a new town and the local bully is ready to pounce. But just as Rodney is about to flee, a baseball flies in from out of nowhere and knocks out the bully. Now everyone thinks Rodney's invincible—when really he feels just the opposite. Can he figure out how to live up to his new reputation and make friends along the way?

***The Call of the Bully***

Rodney Rathbone was expecting the best summer ever until his parents shipped him off to Camp Wy-Mee. Now he's in for the ride of a lifetime. Far from home in the great outdoors, he must outsmart—and outrun—a whole new crop of bullies, including Todd, the bratty rich kid, and Magnus, the evil Swede. Whether facing treacherous rapids or leading a nighttime spy mission, Rodney makes new friends and soon finds himself in the unlikely role of camp hero. How long it lasts will depend on whether a former adversary gets her way.

**Curriculum Connections: Reading, Writing, and Researching**

The activity below correlates to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.2) (RL.6.2) (SL.4-6.1, 2, 3).

**Prereading Activity**

Please see the prereading reproducible at the end of this guide.

**Exploring *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* and *The Call of the Bully* through Writing and Research**

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3, 7, 9) (RL.5.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9) (RL.6.1, 2, 3) (SL.6.1, 2, 3) (W.4-6.4)

The following questions may be utilized throughout the novel study as reflective writing prompts, or, alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection.

1. At the opening of *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying*, Rodney is asked, “So what’ll it be, a black eye or a bloody nose?” How does his first day of school in Ohio feel like just

another day to him? Based on your personal experience, do you think it's common for bullies to target new kids? Why or why not?

2. Describe Rodney. What makes him a dynamic person? Is he the type of friend you would want? Why or why not?

3. Rodney states, "Looking back on it now, I can't believe I made it through that first day. Heck, I can't believe I survived all the way to graduation. It's a pretty amazing story to tell. Adults will say I'm exaggerating, but I don't blame them. Even I have a hard time believing what happened to me this year!" Think about Rodney's story—do you think he might be exaggerating? If so, why would he be? Explain your position.

4. Why do Rodney's teachers seem to dislike him so much? Do you think they have a legitimate reason to feel that way? Why or why not?

5. Rodney has a gift of finding ways to turn bad situations to his advantage. How is he able to accomplish this? What are some specific examples from the books you liked best?

6. In *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying*, after Rodney dumps his popcorn and coke on Jessica while watching a horror movie, Jessica angrily declares to Rodney, "You were afraid? I thought the great Rodney Rathbone wasn't afraid of anything." Do you believe Jessica had a reason to be upset? In what ways has Rodney's bravery act backfired?

7. Consider Rodney's great-aunt Evelyn. How do her gifts to Rodney ultimately help him foil a couple of the problems he faces at school? Did you find the rest of Rodney's family to be supportive of him? In what ways do they offer solutions to his bullying problem?

8. Consider both novels' cover art. In what ways are the images represented symbolic for the events that transpire throughout the course of the books?

9. Describe Josh, Toby, Todd, and Magnus. What do these boys have in common? In your opinion, why do they act the way they do? Did you witness any growth by any of these characters?

10. In *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying*, what are the most impressive obstacles Rodney overcomes? Which of these hurdles did you like best? Why?

11. Explain the significance of the titles, *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* and *The Call of the Bully*. In your opinion, do they accurately describe the events and relationships portrayed in the book?

12. On their way to camp, Josh tells Rodney, "Yeah, Rathbone, you ain't that tough. I could see you were real scared at graduation. I was a fool all year, thinkin' you were tough. This time nothing's saving you." How does Josh's ominous threat make Rodney feel? How does good fortune once again save Rodney?

13. Consider the cast of characters in the novels: Who did you like the most? The least? For what reason? Of all of the characters, who did you feel was most similar to you due to his/her personality or experiences?

14. Though much of it proves to be challenging, what do you believe Rodney gets out of his experience attending Camp Wy-Mee?

15. *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* and its companion, *The Call of the Bully*, are told by Rodney, in first person. How would the stories be different if there were a different narrator telling it? Do you think changing the point of view would make the story better or worse? Why?

16. Using the phrase, “These are stories about . . . ,” supply five words to describe *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* and *The Call of the Bully*. Explain your choices.

### **Extended Writing and Research Prompts**

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3) (RL.5.1, 2, 4) (RL.6.1, 2) (W.4-6.4)

1. In *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* and *The Call of the Bully*, readers witness all the students mature and grow throughout the course of the novels. Based on your observations, which character do you believe demonstrates the greatest growth? Compose a short persuasive essay offering your position on this issue. While considering your selected character’s experiences, use textual evidence to provide specific examples to support your case.

2. In both books, the story focuses on Rodney and his relationships with his friends and family. Consider your most special relationships. What makes these individuals so important? Compose a personal journal entry where you share your thoughts, and be sure to answer the following questions:

- Who are the individuals who mean the most to you?
- Why is that particular relationship so special?
- What’s the greatest sacrifice you’ve made for the people you love?
- In what ways have the changes you’ve experienced in your life affected those to whom you are closest?

To culminate, ask for volunteers to share their writing with the class.

3. Through the events of both novels, readers are offered great insight about Rodney’s point of view. Assume the role of one of the secondary characters from either novel and draft a diary entry, detailing what you experienced and witnessed. To prepare, create an outline using the five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why). Remember to write in first person and give special attention to sensory imagery (what you saw, smelled, heard, etc.).

### **Considering *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* and *The Call of the Bully* through Literary Elements Analysis**

The questions and activities below correlate to the following Common Core State Standards:  
(RL.4-6.1, 2, 5, 6)

Use the following activities to allow students to show their understanding of various literary elements in the novel.

### 1. Thematic Connections

Consider the following themes of *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* and *The Call of the Bully*: bravery, ingenuity, friendship, and perseverance. Select one of the themes and find examples from the book that help support this theme. Create a sample Life Lesson Chart using the model at: [http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson\\_images/lesson826/chart.pdf](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson826/chart.pdf).

### 2. Considering Character

The purpose of this strategy is to help students demonstrate knowledge of a character in either *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* or *The Call of the Bully* by following written prompts to complete a poem about the individual. Students can be given the prompts to follow on a worksheet or alternatively, students may create an original slideshow using PowerPoint, Prezi, or Movie Maker.

#### “I AM” POEM

##### FIRST STANZA:

I am (name the character)

I wonder about (something the character is actually curious about)

I hear (an imaginary sound the character might hear)

I see (an imaginary sight the character might see)

I want (something the character truly desires)

##### SECOND STANZA:

I pretend (something the character actually pretends to do)

I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)

I touch (an imaginary touch)

I worry about (something that really bothers the character)

I cry because (something that makes the character very sad)

I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

##### THIRD STANZA:

I understand (something the character knows is true)

I say (something that the character believes in)

I dream about (something the character might actually dream about)

I try (something the character makes an effort to do)

I hope (something the character actually hopes for)

I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

#### BIOPOEM:

Line 1: First name

Line 2: Three traits that describe the character

Line 3: Relative of \_\_\_\_\_

Line 4: Lover of \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 5: Who feels \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 6: Who needs \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 7: Who fears \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 8: Who gives \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 9: Who would like to see \_\_\_\_\_ (three things)  
Line 10: Resident of \_\_\_\_\_  
Line 11: Last name \_\_\_\_\_

3. Select a favorite character from *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* or *The Call of the Bully* and create a character analysis T-shirt. Identify the literary elements used by the author to describe the character, and then create a visual representation of the character traits. The front of the shirt must include the book title, author's name, and the character's name, picture, and description. The right sleeve must list the character's strength and the left sleeve should list the character's weaknesses. List internal and external conflicts, figurative language, and the story's climax on the back of the T-shirt.

4. Working with others, create a character trait silhouette about your favorite or least favorite character in *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* and *The Call of the Bully*. Begin by tracing an appropriately sized member of the group onto butcher paper. The silhouette must be "life size." The traced silhouette should reflect physical traits of the character, so modify as you draw. Next, cut out the silhouette and include ten values from your list. These need to be the most important traits of your character. For each trait, a quote that supports the description needs to be included. Inside the silhouette, include symbols which represent your character's interests, personality, beliefs, skills, or profession.

5. Character "To Do" List: Remind students that, like us, literary characters have tasks they need to complete. Have students select a character of their choice and create a list of the most important tasks at hand for that character with explanations as to why those tasks are so necessary.

*This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, a teacher and school librarian in Coppell, Texas. Dr. Brock holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.*

*This guide, written to align with the Common Core State Standards ([www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)) has been provided by Simon & Schuster for classroom, library, and reading group use. It may be reproduced in its entirety or excerpted for these purposes.*

## Prereading Activity

**Note to Teachers:** As a prereading activity, have students complete this anticipation guide before they begin reading the books.

Instruct students to complete the guide by placing a “+” sign in the box next to the statements for which they agree, and a “0” next to those for which they disagree. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there are no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.

Teachers, feel free to add additional statements in order to extend the activity.

<i>Before Reading</i>	<i>After Reading</i>	<i>Statements</i>
		A bully must always be dealt with by force.
		Teachers always want what’s best for their students.
		Acting brave is the same as being brave.
		Friends always have your best interest at heart.