

## STORY TWENTY-THREE

# STICKS AND STONES

(ABOUT CRUEL WORDS AND HOW TO RISE ABOVE THEM)

## GINNY'S STORY

### EDUCATORS' NOTES

*Suggested age for story – 8–11 years old*

Children need to learn resilience when it comes to friendships and bullies. They need to be able to stand up for themselves and not let others make them feel bad about themselves. They need to know how to stand up to people who call them names.

If a child learns this type of resilience they will be able to cope with many different types of people and personalities and they will not be afraid of saying what they believe in and speaking up for what they know is wrong. This will be useful for them later on in life at secondary school or during their years in higher education and in the workplace.

All pre- and post-lesson exercises can be used for evaluation purposes if required.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Knowing what to say when others call you names.
- Don't take on board other people's 'negative' thoughts about the way you look.
- Be confident about who you are and what you look like.
- Protect your heart from cruel words.
- Understand that there will always be bullies but you don't have to be a victim.

## INTRODUCTION STATEMENT

Today we are going to talk about friendship and bullies and how important it is to be confident when other people call you names and try to make you feel awful about the way you look. School life should be a good experience for everyone – a chance to learn new skills, make lots of friends and try new things. It should be a time in your life when you shouldn't have to worry about anything. It isn't a good experience for everyone though because some children are teased for the way they look or act and for the way they are. Maybe they are not the brightest child in the class or they stand out a bit more than the other children. Sometimes there is no reason at all; it's just the bully being mean.

Being teased or being bullied happens and it can make children feel terrible about themselves and sometimes not want to go to school. No child deserves to be teased or bullied.

People who like to tease others do it because they are unhappy with the way their own life is. They may be unhappy at home and so like to make other children unhappy at school. They try and make others feel rotten so they feel better about themselves. For some children, to be able to make another person upset whilst looking cool in front of their friends makes them feel powerful. Other children are jealous. There are so many reasons why some children are mean to others and most of the time we never really know the real reason.

We must not let the bullies win by letting them make us feel awful about who we are and how we feel about ourselves. We need to believe we are good people and stop the teasing quickly before it gets to be a bigger and more serious problem.

### PRE- AND POST-LESSON EXERCISE

Ask the children if they feel confident about standing up to people calling them names. How many strategies do they know if someone calls them names? Before reading the story get them to write them down. At the end of the story get them to look over the list they have made and add any new ideas they have.

The girls that teased Ginny in the story I am going to read stopped what they were doing very quickly because she knew what to say and do.

# GINNY'S STORY

OMG where do I start?

Worst few days. EVER!

Mum said I'm such a drama queen when I say that but see what you think.

It all started with Rachel.

New girl. Brainy. Great looking. Uber-popular. Funny... Sly. Cruel. Sums it up. Doesn't it? Really?

Everyone was all over her from the moment she arrived.

Except me. And a few others I guess. But we never talked about it. Just saw her coming. Gave each other the look and moved away to get on with our already okay lives at school. Well, they had been okay.

Until Rachel arrived.

At the time it seemed like the whole of my class wanted to be best mates with Rachel.

Me and a few others crept around the outside of the ever-growing fan club. Kept our heads down and went on with our lives.

I never did fit into the 'popular' group. But actually once you've got used to the fact you're not in the cool group, the pressure to be a part of it disappears and, you know something? It's a much nicer place to be.

Once the pushing around for a place next to Rachel had stopped and Rachel settled in with her gang of four other girls, most of us breathed a sigh of relief.

I'd seen those programmes on the TV about the survival of the fittest in jungles and it didn't surprise me to see that the same bullies who had tormented the class for the past four years were now arm in arm with Rachel and strutting their stuff around the playground every break time while they boasted to everyone about their new-found friend.

A few months passed. I had almost forgotten about Rachel. Stupid really.



I should have known better.

There had always been this one girl in my class, Ashley, who had been the ringleader of whatever nastiness happened to anyone. Of course, she was one of Rachel's newly found BFFs and one lunch break I heard her voice drifting across the playground towards me as I sat talking to one of my friends, Jazz. Jazz dug me hard in the waist with her fingers and I looked up.

The gang of five, as we now called Rachel and her cronies, were heading in my direction.

Perfect.

Rachel's face had that 'look who's here' expression and Ashley had her arm linked into hers.

As always, Ashley's face was twisted into some sort of evil witch look and she spat her words out.

'Where'd you get that haircut, string bean? You look like a boy. An ugly, ugly boy. You need to take yourself to St Dominic's down the road. You'd fit in better with the boys.'

The five girls laughed loudly.

'This is a girls' school, in case your mother got a bit confused. You need to look like a girl to be here. You and your little friend certainly don't,' Rachel added.

I felt tears pricking my eyes. Hot and painful. I tried not to let one escape but it betrayed me and started heading down my cheek. An angry, hurt tear.

I was aware of the fact I was tall, skinny and had no shape.

Yet, most of the time I forgot. My friends, like Jazz, didn't care about what shape I was or anything. We just had fun. Great fun. The teasing and bullying up to now had been about my shape. Skinny beanpole. That was okay. I'd got over that. Accepted it.

My hair though hadn't ever entered into any of the taunts.

But I'd had a haircut at the weekend and this was the first day back. So I got noticed.

The hairdresser had suggested a nice short cut to match my shape and size. She layered it and said it would be fashionable and easy to do. I had been so happy. So happy.



I think that was it. I'd been so happy that the feeling of hurt at having that happiness taken away was more painful. I guess.

The gang laughed when they saw me cry. Then they walked away. I felt hate for them. Jazz sat silently beside me.

'That was sooo bad,' she whispered and then put her arm around me.

I nodded.

Through the afternoon when we moved from class to class for our lessons, one of the gang would make sure they pushed their way past me and Jazz and whisper loudly.

'Boys shouldn't be here. You'll both get thrown out soon.'

My mum picked me up from school and straight away noticed I was quiet.

'Good day at school, Ginny?' she said as she kissed me on the cheek.

'Okay I guess.'

'Anyone notice your hair cut?'

'Oh yeah.'

'Great. Bet they liked it.'

'Not really. Wish you hadn't suggested it really,' I said quietly and then bit my tongue.

Wasn't Mum's fault. Although I wanted to blame her. Anyone. Then it would make it okay to be teased about it. 'Cos I hadn't had a hand in it. Been told to have it. But I knew I'd wanted it as much as Mum had wanted me to have it. But I was kind of clutching at straws.

'Why on earth not?' she said as we got into the car.

'Don't want to talk about it,' I replied.

'Okay well maybe later then,' Mum said. She knew I only talked about stuff when I was ready.

I did my homework and then watched a bit of TV.

At dinner Mum and Dad were talking about our summer holiday and where we were going.

'It's very hot where we're going so you're going to be glad your hair is short, Ginny,' Mum said cheerfully.



I moved the peas around my plate and didn't say anything. I had gone over and over in my mind what happened that day and stared at myself in the mirror.

I hated what I saw. I never had before. Now, because of Rachel and her cronies, I hated something that I had loved only a day earlier.

I decided that talking to Mum was a good option after all. She always had a great view on stuff.

When I'd finished, she settled back in her chair and folded her hands in her lap.

'You know, Ginny. Girls like Rachel are bullies because they are trying to feel good about themselves. Saying mean things to others is a way of taking away from the bad feelings they have about something in their lives. We will never know what. But there will be something.

I know it's hard to ignore it when people say things to you like that but if you could try and understand that it's about them more than it is about you, you can step away from it.'

'I wanted to say mean things back to her but I think it would make them worse towards me,' I said.

'Two wrongs will never make a right, darling. You're just showing them that you care by acting the same as them. They are just words. Nothing else. Words. And they are coming from the mouths of people you don't even like. So you need to say to yourself that if you don't care for them, why do you care for what they say? Look I have a suggestion of what you can say to them. It worked for me when I was at school when I had this horrid girl named Sophie who started bullying me.'

I tossed and turned that night. Mum's suggestion was brilliant but I'll admit I was nervous about school and how Rachel and Ashley had made me feel. The following morning I went into school and went straight to Jazz. I told her what Mum's idea was and she grinned.

At break time, the gang made their way across the playground once more.

'If it isn't the wannabe boys,' Rachel taunted as she reached us. 'I thought I told you, you shouldn't be in this school.'



‘We really don’t care what you think anymore,’ I said and stood up and raised my face to look Rachel straight in the eye.

Jazz stood up too next to me and she straightened her shoulders and put her hands on her waist and glared at them.

‘See, we are both who we are and we’re happy about it. We only care about what our friends think. Not what people like you think. You don’t matter to us. So if you’ve got something to say to us, we won’t hear it from now on. Ever. It will be like your voice hits an invisible bubble around us and it won’t reach our ears. So don’t bother saying stuff anymore.’ I looked at Jazz after I said it and then I stared hard at Rachel again and didn’t blink.

Rachel stood for a minute and then turned on her heels.

‘You still look like boys,’ she said over her shoulder.

‘Did you hear something, Ginny?’ Jazz said to me as we both sat down.

‘Might have been an insect buzzing,’ I said and smiled.

The teasing didn’t stop for ages. Of course. It lessened but Rachel and her friends were too stupid to take the hint that it wasn’t affecting Jazz and me anymore. They had to keep trying. After all, it’s the survival of the fittest in their eyes and backing down wasn’t an option. But thanks to my mum’s suggestion, Jazz and I got to the point where we actually didn’t really hear what they said because we weren’t interested anymore so the words didn’t hurt us.

Words really are just that. They come from people’s mouths and sometimes they are wise and sometimes they are just total rubbish. It is best only to listen to the people who you care about and ignore those who you don’t. If we don’t care for the bullies then we should not care for their words either.

So yeah, maybe I’m a drama queen.



## NOTES TO SUPPORT THE DISCUSSION

There are many other ways Ginny could have dealt with the mean girls. One thing she could have done is ignore them totally so they got bored of calling her names. She could also have agreed with what the girls were saying. For example, when she was told ‘You look like a boy,’ she could have answered, ‘Yes. I do and I quite like it.’

I think we should always remember that whatever someone says to us, we don’t let it turn our good mood into a bad mood. We need to be able to switch on the button that says, ‘I am not going to let these words hurt me. Those girls are clearly jealous of me being so fantastic. I am not going to let them make me feel bad.’

Understanding that children who are bullies are not usually happy in their own lives can help us to walk away from the situation and ignore them. We should never allow someone else to take away our own happiness just because they are unhappy.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO ASK THE CHILDREN

- What do you think about the story?
- What do you think about what Ginny did?
- What did you learn from it?
- Do you think you would have done something different to Ginny? If so, what?
- How do you think Rachel would have felt having someone stand up to her?
- If Rachel had tried to become your friend and you knew that she was a bully what would you have done?

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### HELPING SOMEONE LIKE GINNY

Ask the children to write a letter to Ginny with the advice they would give her. Include in it how she could feel better about the way she looked.

### TAKE A LOOK AT YOURSELF

Get the children to draw pictures of themselves and write next to them the things they love about their body or their face. They should be told to write down at least five things.

### **STICKS AND STONES**

The story is called sticks and stones. Ask the group to make up a poem that is about names that will never hurt you.

### **LESSON LEARNT**

Put the children into groups and ask them to make up a lesson plan to teach other children about bullies and teasing.

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