

The following story and lesson is adapted from the story 'Deciding About Dean' found in Lion's Quest - Unit three – Grade 5

1. Introduce and read the story, 'Deciding about Joe'
2. Ask the students if they have ever said or done something that wasn't meant to be funny but someone laughed or teased them
3. Have some discussion about the difference between laughing with someone and being laughed at
4. Ask the students to offer some choices about what Mrs. Smith's class might do.
5. Ask the class to write about what happened when some students started to pick on Joe (discuss negative peer pressure)
6. Ask the students to write about things the class could do to help Joe feel included
7. Ask them to write a new story detailing the next day when Joe returns to a more inclusive classroom
8. Share the stories

Deciding about Joe

Josef Papodopolis or Joe was new at school, and for a reason no one could explain, from the day he arrived in Mrs. Smith's class, students started to make fun of him. Maybe it was his name or the funny clothes he wore or maybe it was the way he asked to get a drink of water or go to the washroom (who actually tells the teacher they need to use the toilet, duh!!). If Joe had a cold and blew his nose too loudly, we laughed, and someone imitated him and we laughed some more. Everyone snickered when he was called upon to read or answer a question. Some students mimicked his accent and the way he walked or ran. Students who liked Joe or felt a little sorry for him were afraid to be with him in case they were teased too. Some of them felt relieved because they had been teased by the other students in the past and now they could be part of the crowd of teasers instead of the one being made fun of. Joe soon realized it was better not to talk in class and if he needed to speak to the teacher he quietly made his way to the front for a whispered consultation.

One day during a game of dodge ball in gym, no-one threw their ball at Joe. Everyone acted as if he weren't in the game and avoided looking at him. Finally he went and sat on the bench and told Mrs. Smith he had a stomach ache.

The next day Joe didn't come to school but Mr. and Mrs. Popodopolus were both waiting to speak to Mrs. Smith before the bell rang. Instead of a math drill to start the day, Mrs. Smith asked us to make a Class Meeting circle for an important discussion. We loved class meetings (and some of us didn't like math drills much) so we quickly moved our chairs into a circle. Today started off a little differently than most of our class meetings. Mrs. Smith usually let a student run them using an agenda filled with classroom problems and suggestions, but today she said she wanted to speak to us about something that wasn't in the agenda.

Finally she said, "I've noticed that Joe has been very quiet for the last few days. I was a little surprised to find out that Joe doesn't want to come back to our classroom. He seems to feel he doesn't fit in and his parents are very concerned because he has been uprooted from his friends and family back home and they have noticed he's very unhappy. Can anyone tell me why you think Joe is having such a difficult time?"

"He's weird, and he does really dumb things!" said John. "What are some of the weird things he does?" Mrs. Smith asked. "Oh, you know, he acts like he doesn't know how to do anything." "Yeah, and he looks weird, too," chimed in Suzy. "Joe doesn't act like that when it's just the two of us playing," Dan said quietly. "I didn't know you played with Joe," said John

in surprise. Dan just shrugged and looked down at his hands. He didn't say anything more but other students in the circle were beginning to look at their hands too. The silence just kept getting longer and longer. "Well," Mrs. Smith finally said, "making fun and picking on someone clearly must stop! When someone is being teased and picked on, it not only makes that person miserable, it makes others in the class worried and unhappy, too. This problem needs solving right away. We need to make some decisions about what we're going to do!"