

Reviewed by Corbin Trimble

## Don't Laugh at Me

By Steve Seskin and Allen Shamblin

Illustrated by Glin Dibley

Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press, 2002

**W**hy is this happening to me? Why me? What did I do wrong? I haven't done anything wrong. I was just trying to help. Don't they know I'm a nice person? Why would they say those things? Don't they know who I am and what I want to become? How am I going to respond to them next time? Is there anyone out there to help me? These questions run through the heads of those who have been bullied, of which I was one. I've been pushed, shoved, spat at, beat up, and called names. There have been way too many bullies in my life. But the voices that haunted me are from the past, not the present – a past I remembered but moved beyond. It is why I agreed to review this book when asked by someone who didn't know my history.

*Don't Laugh at Me*, written by Steve Seskin and Allen Shamblin and illustrated by Glin Dibley, reveals the immense number of students in the United States who are bullied every day. Those bullied could be the ones who are selected last to play a game, or wear glasses or braces, or have something unique about them that attracts attention. They could have some type of physical, emotional, or mental disability. At its simplest level, the book's words and illustrations portray victims of bullying, who often ask the question, "Why?"

Delving deeper, teachers can use the book to guide children to empathize with bullying victims and brainstorm strategies to deal with this ongoing problem. Discussions with my students with whom I shared the book generated thought-provoking statements. They ranged from solutions:

"You should just walk away," "You should speak up," "You need to tell an adult," "Just ignore those making fun of you," and "Stand up for yourself," to ways children can help each other: "You should befriend those who

are bullied," and "Show them (the bullied child) respect by not laughing." How amazing it was to hear from a child, "We may all look different on the outside but we have the same spirit inside."

Could we, as educators, help bullied children find answers to "Why me?" Could we empower children to overcome whatever challenges they encounter? Could we encourage them to embrace life's adventures with all its unexpected twists and turns? The answer is a resounding, "Yes!" You, as their music and movement educator, have the power to guide them as they respond to the challenges they face. Now that's an amazing fact and responsibility.

This book also includes a CD featuring the phenomenal folk trio, "Peter, Paul, and Mary," singing the song "Don't Laugh at Me." Its simple folk melody is easily sung with the demonstration track alone or with its performance track. The book and CD could easily be incorporated into a school-wide assembly promoting self worth, respect, and accountability to one another. Additionally, a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the book are donated to the Operation Respect "Don't Laugh at Me" Project.

Check this book out at your local library or ask your librarian to consider its purchase for classroom use. Its impact will be felt by those who need it most—the children who are victims of bullying. ■

**CORBIN TRIMBLE** lives in Kansas and is a K-6 music and movement educator in the Kansas City Public Schools. He belongs to the Heart of America-AOSA chapter and is currently empowering his students to do the right thing.

