

A photograph of two children, a boy and a girl, standing in a lush green field. They are both wearing school uniforms and are focused on reading books they are holding. The boy is on the left, wearing a white shirt and brown shorts, and the girl is on the right, wearing a white shirt and a dark blue skirt. The background is a soft-focus green field with tall grass.

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Social Justice Journal

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5

*Insights from
Victims of bullying,
Teachers, and a
Psychologist*

*How to Appreciate XX-
Century Classics in the
Digital Age*

**The Struggles and
Triumphs of Students
in Africa**

KATRIN HRISTOVA

The Hidden Voices of Education

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the first issue of The Catalyst, where we delve into the critical issue of social injustice in education. As the Editor-in-Chief of this journal, I am honored to share with you a collection of stories, blogs, and articles that explore this critical topic.



We believe that education is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for creating a more equitable society. Unfortunately, social injustice remains a pervasive issue in many educational systems around the world. This issue of The Catalyst aims to shed light on the various forms of social injustice that exist in education, from racial and socioeconomic disparities to systemic inequalities. In addition, we are excited to share with you a series of pictures that I have taken myself. Through these pictures, I aimed to capture the essence of my own life and experiences, and I believe that they also reflect the authenticity and truthfulness that we strive to bring to our work in this journal.

Thank you for joining us on this journey, and we hope that this issue of The Catalyst will inspire you to reflect on the role of education in creating a more just and equitable society.

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Dana Koptleuova
Editor-in-Chief

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The Catalyst

Rethinking Education & Literature

Explore the importance of diversity and representation in education and literature, while delving into the challenges of reading XX century literature and the need to discover contemporary voices.

By Katrin Hristova

Inclusivity is power

Your individuality and personality are contagious, dear reader. You are special, unprecedented, and one-of-a-kind. But we are born, raised, or have lived in at least one community, nation, ethnicity, and context.

However, some of these pieces of the puzzle are neglected in terms of representation.

Recently, my eyes were walking along a wall around a vintage bookstore when they stopped in front of Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. It is a tremendously heartbreaking account of racism, poverty, generations, generational trauma, and the layers of society. The society of the state of Georgia, US. One of the layers is the educational system.

Among the family that we follow, we meet Ruth Copeland, a girl who, thankfully, is able to go to school. What's more, she absolutely loves learning.

Ruth is a girl of color whose innocent view of the world is still untainted, unpolluted by bias, racism, or any of the other ideologies that, unfortunately, exist.

Ruth, however, reminded me of something that I, as a Caucasian girl, hadn't noticed.

While I do criticize my school books about the misrepresentation of history, she notices that:

- All schoolbooks are written by Caucasians.
- They completely misrepresent her community, the nation she has seen, and the society she is growing up in.

In turn, we see that in a discussion on justice in education, we need to look at the representation of different social groups in school books. As a result, we nurture empathy, humanness, and inclusivity—words that our world needs. Only then, knowledge can be power.

First, there is the visual aspect. It wasn't too long ago when the university brochures started including more Caucasians. It was not too long ago that films were inclusive in that same sense, too.



The representation gap that we observe has consequences for people whose appearance is not "normalized".

When did you see someone who looked like you in a school book?

If you have an answer, think of what that means for those who do not.

If you don't have one, I apologize on behalf of the publishers. They did not know better.

Inclusivity is a long-term, global mission. It has no age, gender, nation, or culture. No birthplace. We need it to reach each and every little spot on the geographical map and plant its roots there.

Secondly, another book that recently provoked similar feelings was Isabel Fonseca's *Bury My Standing*, an exploration of the Romani community. Although Romani people are a part of the society I grew up in, we never studied them. These 320 pages offered me insight that my educational system never chose to offer.

Why are certain ethnic groups not represented at all?

How can one understand and empathize with all societal groups if one is not aware of them and doesn't know the complexity and beauty of their roots?

Whether it's visual or textual representation, we need to locate gaps and address them. Only then can the aforementioned individuality flourish.



“In Africa social injustice in education prevents many students from reaching their full potential.”

Education is the key to a better future for all of us. But in Africa, social injustice in education prevents many students from reaching their full potential.

There are many forms of social injustice in education in Africa. For example, students from rural areas are often denied access to quality education. They may have to travel long distances to get to school, and the schools they attend may be overcrowded and under-resourced.

Students from marginalized groups, such as those with disabilities or from ethnic minorities, may also face discrimination in school. They may be excluded from classes, bullied by their peers, or even denied a school placement altogether.

Girls are often discouraged from pursuing STEM fields.

They may be told that these subjects are not for them, or they may not have the same opportunities as their male peers to take STEM classes. Students who are poor or from low-income families may not have the same opportunities as their wealthier peers. They may not be able to afford to pay for school fees, textbooks, or uniforms. They may also have to work to help support their families, which leaves them less time for studying.

These are just a few examples of the many ways that social injustice can manifest itself in education in Africa. It is important to be aware of these issues so that we can work to address them and create a more just and equitable educational system for all students in Africa.

By Yezir Hasan

Photo credit
Olivia Wilson / Liceria Co.

By Iduiya Sawwash

You are allowed to grieve

As I write this today, I want to tell you something important, something that many people might not understand or acknowledge: You are allowed to grieve. When we lose our idols, the people we look up to and admire, it can feel like a punch to the gut. These are people who have inspired us, motivated us, and changed our lives in some way. They may be gone now, but their impact remains deeply ingrained in our hearts and minds.

It's easy for others to dismiss the pain of losing an idol. They might say, "You didn't even know them personally," or "There are more important things to worry about." But I'm here to tell you that your grief is valid. It's important to honor the emotions that come with such a loss, because these individuals were, in a way, a part of our lives.

Our idols represent our hopes, our dreams, and our aspirations. They show us what's possible and give us the courage to pursue our own paths. So when they pass away, it's like losing a guiding light—a beacon that once illuminated our way forward. We feel lost and disoriented, as if a part of ourselves has vanished.

Grieving for an idol doesn't mean you're overly sentimental or weak. It means you're human, and you have the capacity to connect with others on a profound level—even with those you've never met in person. Your grief is an expression of the love and admiration you held for that person, and it's a testament to their influence and the difference they made in your life.

So, allow yourself to feel the pain. Cry if you need to. Reflect on the impact they had on you, and celebrate their life and their accomplishments. Remember the lessons they taught you, and carry those with you as you continue to move forward.

In time, the pain will dull, and you'll find your own way to keep their memory alive. You'll use their inspiration to fuel your own journey, and perhaps one day, you'll become someone else's idol. But until then, remember that you are allowed to grieve. Your feelings are valid, and you don't need anyone else's permission to feel the way you do.





Competing with a Star Student Sibling — How I Learned Not to Compare Myself

By Dana Koptleuova

Living in the shadow of successful siblings is tough on anyone's confidence. For years, that was my reality as I grew up with sisters who excelled academically and socially while getting praised by everyone around them. Meanwhile, I struggled to find my path and constantly felt like I wasn't measuring up.

In a personal diary entry from a year ago, I wrote about how those comparisons have led to feelings of self-doubt and imposter syndrome that still plague me. It's hard to trust your capabilities when everyone around you seems to think you're inferior. It took an exhausting journey filled with ups and downs for something to click in place — the knowledge that all along we had been running different races altogether, distracted by irrelevant external factors until we discovered our unique paths forward.

Individuating oneself can be challenging because social pressures can influence our choices subconsciously, but making decisions aligned with your genuine interests fans the flame within your soul, such that little victories feel significant alongside significant leaps forward.

Whether one chooses a similar or dissimilar career path compared to their siblings or peers doesn't matter; what matters most is whether they are happy and fulfilled. When you compete against yourself instead of others, it's easier to be sanguine about your life's course. Learning how to stop comparing myself to my star-student siblings was a journey filled with challenges yet rewarding.

I chose not to be bogged down by constant comparison. It was crucial at this point not just for growth but also to accept that we are all different, unique, and have our strengths.

Overcoming comparison was challenging; however, communication played an essential role in finding a solution that worked for us all. My parents and sisters became more sensitive after discussing how their constant comparisons made me feel; it allowed us to understand each other's perspectives better, in turn supporting one another as best we could.

Through this journey of self-discovery, embracing uniqueness became effortless rather than feeling threatened by others' achievements or aspirations. Rather than focusing on comparison, continuing personal growth helps you set your own goals rather than anyone else's.

Now a brighter future lies ahead because the burden of comparison is lifted off my shoulders, allowing me to celebrate success openly — both mine and my sisters'. Remember, the real competition that counts starts with oneself, so embrace your unique side and shine brightly and unapologetically!

Insights from Victims of Bullying: Malika's Experience

Malika enters the room with a warm smile, her eyes bright and full of life. She takes a seat and gets comfortable, eager to share her thoughts on a topic that's close to her heart. As the conversation begins, she occasionally laughs and shakes her head, emphasizing the emotional weight of her experiences.

Interviewer: How common is verbal school bullying among secondary school students?

Malika: I believe that it's very common, especially here in Kazakhstan. Of course, I cannot speak for other countries, as I have no experience studying there. There is a lot of malice in today's children. (shakes her head)

Interviewer: Have verbal bullies affected your mental conditions, like self-esteem and so on?

Malika: Yes, very much. When I was in high school, I weighed 80 kilograms and had pimples on my face, so I was bullied very much. The teenagers around me told me, "You don't suit us; we don't want to communicate with you because you look like this." I have heard this from both girls and boys, and it has greatly affected my self-esteem, my perception and acceptance of myself, and my love for myself. I didn't accept myself for a very long time, and because of this, it was difficult psychologically. (sighs)

Interviewer: Has verbal school bullying affected your academic performance?

Malika: All my thoughts during school were mostly fixated on bullying, which hindered my growth and academic success. I just couldn't concentrate on my studies, and the teachers were unhappy with my absent-mindedness. (laughs)

Interviewer: What kind of support did you want to receive from teachers?

Malika: I would like to receive such support from teachers, well, you know, as if it were support from my mother. So that they just pat me on the head and say, "Everything will be fine in the future; don't worry; let's talk to you about this topic; let's discuss this problem with your classmates." I wanted them to hold a certain session with my classmates so that they understood that it was at least disrespectful to bully others. (nods)

Interviewer: What kind of support did you want to receive from your non-bully classmates?

Malika: I would like my classmates to just ask me, "How are you? How's your condition? What happened to you?" so that they would cheer me up. It's just that a little child support would have really saved me a few years ago in moral terms. (smiles)

Interviewer: How can verbal school bullying among teenagers be prevented?

Malika: It is just necessary for adults to communicate more with students and be interested in their affairs. Teenagers themselves are very closed; for example, my younger sister is also a teenager, and it is sometimes quite problematic to find out how she is doing, but when she starts talking, everything just pours out of her, and she sincerely shares her problems. (laughs) At such moments, it is important to make sure that the teenager knows that you can help them solve these problems. To do this, you just need to ask, "Do you need help? How can I help you?". Adults need to take the first steps because it's all about understatement. People hurt each other for a reason, right? It would also be cool to take classes like "an hour with a psychologist" to schools, where students can discuss collective problems that arise in their classroom together with a psychologist and teacher, or conduct such classes individually with each student at least once every two weeks so that any teenager knows that they can get help from a professional. (nods emphatically)



Insights from Victims of Bullying: Alexandra's Experience

Alexandra is a 17-year-old high school student with long brown hair and a shy smile. She wears a black T-shirt and jeans. Her eyes light up when she talks about her interests, but when the conversation moves to her experiences with verbal bullying, her demeanor changes, and she becomes more reserved.

Interviewer: How common is verbal school bullying among secondary school students?

Alexandra: In every class there is a person who is bullied. As a rule, I believe that at least one-tenth of all students are victims of bullying. This problem concerns not only schools but also all educational institutions where children and adolescents are located. But schools are more hamstrung by this because students spend most of their day there. Usually, the objects of bullying are appointed by the teachers themselves, and not by children or teenagers. In bullying, I think it is the teachers who are most to blame because, as it seems to me, they support bullying the most.

Interviewer: Have verbal bullying affected your mental condition (self-esteem, etc.)?

Alexandra: Yes, it did. For example, I have dermatillomania, and an eating disorder appeared precisely because of bullying. ED is, it seems to me, the most common thing that occurs among the victims of bullying. By the way, experts call dermatillomania obsessive behavior directed at the skin: scratching wounds, squeezing out inflammation, combing skin irregularities, tearing off burrs, biting lips and cheeks from the inside.

Interviewer: Have verbal school bullying affected your academic performance?

Alexandra: It affected my academic performance because, at least, I skipped lessons in the 11th grade for at least six months because I was sitting next to the person who bullied me the most. Moreover, even if I and other students had the same answers in homework, they wrote "wrong" in my notebook since I was a kind of whipping toy. That is, the teachers in the classroom supported this general bullying in my direction and were ready to turn a blind eye to such dubious moments when, with a perfectly completed task, only because of the exclamations of my classmates, they gave me "unsatisfactory" even, in principle, without understanding whether this was really the case. And so, once I had seven bad grades at the end of the quarter, which is why I was given a "three" in the certificate. My other points of view in my essays were ridiculed; it was so that my essays were regularly read by teachers in front of the whole class to stupidly scold along with the students. If it wasn't for the contemptuous attitude of my classmates towards me, I would not have had bad grades, which in other circumstances could easily have been A's.

Interviewer: What kind of support did you want to receive from teachers?

Alexandra: At that point, I just wanted the teachers to treat me the same way they treated other students. That is, if I came to school in a black shirt, the teachers kicked me out of class immediately, although 10 more girls with loose hair and jeans were sitting in the classroom. I was constantly being picked on. Therefore, for me, the word teacher and support are simply incompatible - I can't even imagine them supporting me. But let me imagine my friend from another class, who was also a victim of bullying, getting support from teachers. In this case, I probably would like teachers to put their abusers in their place because, in this way, they could regulate bullying in the classroom.

Interviewer: What kind of support did you want to receive from your non-bully classmates?

Alexandra: I would like to get just protection from them. For example, when I was insulted for my weight, I would like my classmates to respond to my abuser, something like: "Hey, man, have you even seen yourself in the mirror? You're twice as fat as she is. who would talk about weight here."

Interviewer: How can verbal school bullying among teenagers be prevented?

Alexandra: Verbal bullying in schools can only be prevented by retaliatory pressure on aggressors. We need to show these teenagers what it's like to be in the shoes of a victim. It is necessary to make a fashion for jokes, that is, to start ridiculing the aggressors, so that everyone understands that being an aggressor is not cool at all, but on the contrary, it is even shameful. But of course, this needs to be done on an adequate scale so that these jokes do not switch to reverse bullying.



Insights from Teachers: Nathan's Experience

I sit down with Nathan, a high school teacher with over 15 years of experience teaching teenagers. When asked about how often he sees verbal bullying among students, Nathan shakes his head and says "At my school, I don't see a lot in a direct manner but like any place teenagers maybe make fun of each other or laugh at each other so a lot of it is determined by your definition of bullying so I would say in my school it's not a very big problem, I think with teenagers it always exists." He pauses for a moment, then continues "I think it's a serious problem in Kazakhstan and around the world because it does affect the emotional health of children."

When asked about the measures he has taken to interrupt bullying, Nathan explains "I think it comes from my classroom teaching. Right at the beginning of every class, I will tell students that the number one rule is to respect each other. For example, if students are presenting something or giving a speech, or giving a talk, my rule is don't talk when other people are talking and don't laugh at someone when they make mistake. So, it's not so much as interrupting the process it's that from the beginning I let students know that laughing at each other or making fun of each other is not acceptable."

On the impact of a teacher's lack of intervention, Nathan says seriously "That's a great question. Very seriously I think if a student feels that they are in an environment where there's no control, where there's nobody who's going to control the atmosphere and they think that they're helpless it could have negative serious negative effects on their mentality they can lose sleep it can worsen their grades but most important is that they spend 8-9 hours at school so they can feel almost like the place they go every day is very scary so teachers not controlling the environment can be devastating to children"

When asked about the impact of verbal bullying on victims' academic performance, Nathan replies "I think it can affect people very badly. One of the things we see is we do a lot of group work and pair work at the school and students may not work with others they may not cooperate. So absolutely their grades can go down if they don't feel comfortable with other people they have to work with."

On the support teachers can provide to victims, Nathan says "Every teacher needs to know the school's algorithm and school's policies and procedures. For example, at my school, we have a very long policy of 56 pages about child protection and there is an exact system of support. So, the first thing is the teacher must know who is in the building. For example, a teacher is irresponsible if they don't know who student's curator is, or we have psychologists if they don't know that we have other people who can help students. So as a professional every teacher must know their school policy, they must read their school policy. A teacher's answer can never be: "I don't know what to do" because there are documents, that tell the teacher what to do."

When asked about the support victims can receive from non-bully classmates, Nathan says "First, anonymity. What I mean is that, if a student reports an incident, then they need to know that if they don't want that told to other students it has to be kept secret. Now as someone under 18 legally the school should tell their parents, but it wouldn't be a situation if one student reports to me that they don't feel safe I can't go to class and stand and say: "hey, she doesn't feel safe!". You know, that's going to be ridiculous and unprofessional! So, the main support they need will be anonymity if they want. So, anything they say is kept confidential and followed by professional standards. The second support is a school psychologist and psychological support. The school must also make connections with community providers. So, say if what we have at school is not enough, we need to know who we can call or refer the student to give further help."

Finally, when asked about how verbal bullying can be prevented, Nathan lists three rules: "1) school has to have policy and procedures. If someone is a bully, the school has to have consequences that go up to being removed from school. So there has to be punishment for bullies. Second, there must be some type of cooperation at home, because usually, if you find students that are bullies, they may have a problem at home. So, you must have some connections with parents, or relatives to discuss. Third, we usually don't think about this: cyberbullying. We have to adapt to the 21st century and shouldn't let teenagers learn about these bullying methods via social media and bully other teenagers online."



Insights from Teachers: Zina's Experience

I sit down with Zina, a very experienced teacher with over 30 years of teaching teenagers. When I ask her about verbal bullying, she sighs and says "I will start from the end of the question, I think that in my homeland, as in many countries, this is a serious problem. By a happy coincidence, there is less of this in our school, but by communicating with colleagues working in secondary schools, I know that this is a very serious problem." She pauses to think for a moment, then continues "Well, my experience of previous work in various educational institutions suggests that verbal bullying takes place in a variety of manifestations. There is no bullying in our school, although I said earlier that this kind of bullying cannot always be expressed even in words and sometimes in some looks, smirks, and glances. A person can feel such serious pressure even under such techniques. I believe that girls can do it in class. I think that of course, bullying is present."

When asked about the measures she takes to interrupt bullying, Zina says seriously "First, let's start with the fact that there is, unfortunately, a category of people who are very active in this regard, and there is a category among adults, let's say, less active. Unfortunately, I observe cases when bovver takes place at school, even all kinds of obscene language coming up from mouths of teenagers or something else, elderly people just don't want to waste their time, energy, and nerves and sometimes try to avoid the situation pretending that this is not happening. This is happening, and if you constantly turn a blind eye to it, it will progress more and more. Therefore, regarding bullying, we have not had to observe such situations in our school recently, but when such cases occurred, of course, I suspended them very actively." She speaks decisively, clearly unwilling to tolerate any bullying in her school.

When asked about the impact of a teacher's lack of intervention, Zina replies seriously "Just now I said, this is the teacher's non-interference, there is an expression: "all the most heinous things are done with something tacit consent." Bullying is one of the most heinous phenomena in school life in general. And if the teacher shows non-interference, I believe that this is even more of a crime than bullying itself. Well, this can affect the further fate of the student in any way. If the teacher sees and does not solve this situation in any way, the victim, as we call it, gradually develops a feeling of absolute insecurity. Because any student still hopes that an adult who is present will support him, and he will receive at least some protection. And non-interference, for me, will further aggravate this situation with bullying." She speaks passionately, clearly believing that a teacher's role in preventing bullying is crucial.

On the impact of verbal bullying on victims' academic performance, Zina says "Of course, this has a huge impact because when a person is in a state of moral discomfort, when they are oppressed and insulted, or they simply tolerate all kinds of manifestations of verbal bullying, they hardly think much about how successful they are in school, they care very little about that. Because a teenager in these circumstances also needs to survive. Therefore, it has the maximum effect on the academic performance of the victim."

When asked about the support teachers can provide, Zina replies "The teacher must show the student that they are protected. Here it is important to morally support the victims of bullying, maybe even hug them, pat on kids' head so that the student begins to feel comfortable and gently explain to them what will happen next. That is, to tell them a kind of plan: to discuss this incident in class, then call parents to school, talk to a psychologist. The teacher must mentally prepare the student for what they will have to face later."

On the support from non-bully classmates, Zina says "If there is such a thing as bullying in the classroom, there are some teenagers who do not participate in it, right? Here they can choose one out of two positions. The first is to "pretend that nothing is happening because it is not my business", the second, more human, more correct, and honest decision is to try to stop this bullying. Always, after all, the person who is the aggressor is not the strongest or smartest person in the classroom team. That is, well, there is always a person in the class who is morally stronger, physically stronger, in the end. A person who can say his weighty word, say: "stop, don't do it"; just shame, or stop more harshly. Non-interference on the part of classmates is even worse than bullying because bullying is always not the smartest, he is asserting himself at the expense of others, and this is already a sign of carelessness. And those who agree with him, at least in not opposing it, are even more stupid people. These are not stupid, but rather dishonest people."

Finally, when asked how verbal bullying can be prevented, Zina says thoughtfully "It's such a complicated thing, but it can be suspended. I know only one thing, all problems are truly solved when they are solved together; adults, teenagers, victims, aggressors — they should work altogether. If someone is alone, if this victim is trying to change something herself, nothing will work. It is only important not to agree with bullying. Do not accept this at the level of the entire school community. After all, we are human beings. You can always talk, but another thing is how much people hear each other. This is necessary, as they say, by daily work on yourself, on your environment. Only work, work, and work again can help."



Insights from a Psychologist: Perizat's Experience

I sit down with Perizat, a psychologist with 10 years of experience counseling students. When asked about verbal bullying, Perizat says "Overall, I think this topic is very relevant. In our society, the problem of bullying takes on a very broad picture. That is, a group of people does bad things to one person. There are many types of bullying, for example, verbal bullying is abusing a person by raising his voice, saying bad things that humiliate his dignity, spreading false gossip from the outside, and saying rude things." She speaks knowledgeably, clearly very familiar with the issue of bullying.

On how common verbal bullying is, Perizat replies "Verbal bullying among schoolchildren and adolescents is very common and in a complex form. For example, sometimes it can be done by a directly oriented society, or there is an ironic principle of "jokes" that exists among teenagers. Even though it seems to people that they do not cause harm, some consequences can lead to mental trauma. Sometimes some students turn others into victims of verbal bullying. There are many reasons, and each teenager has different ones. It may be based on the situation, it may be related to the social environment, it may be related to family relationships, it may be related to the predominance of aggressive qualities in the child, and if you continue, there are many reasons. Teenagers do not know how to build relationships, so young people cannot properly show leadership and empathize with and support each other. In addition, when a child who was previously in the role of a victim moves to another school, in a new environment, they can become an aggressor there." She speaks knowledgeably, clearly having counseled many students on this issue.

When asked about the mental consequences for victims, Perizat replies seriously "There are a lot of consequences. Firstly, a student may not want to go to school, because a person can tolerate such pressure from aggressors. Secondly, the child may not be interested in anything and does not want to talk to anyone. Third, psychosomatic diseases may cause headaches, etc. Sometimes students may not go to school under the pretext that they are sick. That is, it may be because he does not want to show his weakness. The victim's self-confidence is lost, and she may begin to blame herself: "I don't need society."

On the measures she takes, Perizat says "Psychologists carry out preventive work against bullying with grades 7-9, we explain the differences between conflict and bullying, define the roles in bullying and its consequences, tell what kind of help a victim of bullying can get from psychologists, and what responsibility bullying aggressors will be brought. We work based on demand, we discuss the issue together with all members of the bullying process, and parents of students, if a request is received from a teacher, a student, a class, or a curator about a bullying problem. We also have a trust box at the school, students can ask for help by leaving letters to psychologists, both anonymously and not anonymously."

When asked about the impact of a teacher's lack of intervention, Perizat replies seriously "In the process of bullying, the participation of adults is necessary since it will not resolve itself. When the teacher is not involved in the bullying process, the victim may feel lonely, the child may have a feeling of hopelessness. Because the teacher does not interfere in this process, the student begins to blame himself, feeling unprotected: "I am to blame for being in such a situation, I could not protect myself."

On the support victims need from teachers, Perizat says "I believe that the teacher needs to carry out activities aimed at strengthening student relationships in the classroom. In case of bullying, a teacher needs to contact the curator and explain everything. And the bullying that occurred during the lesson, the teacher should be able to stop. Because if the teacher turns a blind eye to such a problem, it can lead to a broader problem."

When asked about the support from classmates, Perizat replies "Classmates need to psychologically help the victim. That is, to express sympathy and support. In addition, in general, the bullying process in the classroom should be stopped. Because the voice of one will not be heard, and when classmates are all against it, we can be sure that this issue will not only be resolved but will not happen in the future."

Finally, on how verbal bullying can be prevented, Perizat says "General bullying cannot be avoided. Since we live in a society, such things have existed, exist, and will happen in the future. But there are ways to stop bullying. First, the students of the class must learn to take care of each other, to show their feelings. If the aggressor is restrained by the students of the class, he will not be able to act alone. On the part of the curator, it is necessary to hold events that will strengthen the relationship between the students of this class. Go somewhere with the class, spend time together outside of school, and play games."





The Catalyst

Rethinking Education & Literature

Explore the importance of diversity and representation in education and literature, while delving into the challenges of reading XX century literature and the need to discover contemporary voices.

By Katrin Hristova

The Literature you read in the classroom: an apology to 21st century readers

Depending on where you are from, you always somewhat know what literature you will study at school next year.

On the one hand, this has the benefit of preparedness. You know what lies ahead of you, you can read the books throughout the summer break, you can watch films if they are available, you can check for summaries that can help you understand the main points, the characters, and so on.

On the other hand, however, the literature of the XX century is tainted with a lot of history. Although any other word could have been selected instead, “tainted” refers to the challenges of the format, the wars, and the political doctrines that influenced it. Firstly, the format. Technology has been a challenge to literature in many aspects. Although the newest form – social media – had not been invented, humanity did get in touch with radio, film and TV. These formats host a wider accessibility rate, a higher amount of content in less time, and lastly, they require not-too-much attention. This “ease” influences the decrease in literature and the shift in the format. Storytelling sits in the back now.

Secondly, the wars. Fortunately, we have inherited books that explore what it was to be physically, mentally and emotionally present during these periods.

There are many literary waves born due to this landscape of violence, trauma and despair. The existentialist movement, a child of WWII, talks about the meaninglessness behind these wars. How old do you have to be when you read such books? How old in age and in emotional intelligence? Thirdly, I am so sorry to say that you also need to be aware of the political doctrines during these periods. Just taking a book off of the shelf and exploring it doesn't work when the writers have been limited, in multiple ways, if not censored altogether.

The literature of the XX century is not a light read, nor does it have to be read lightly.

Lastly, you are most probably robbed of the opportunity to read contemporary authors. The humans, who are trying to discuss the oh-so-ignored topics of race, gender, and class are not even discussed at school.

Ironically, although we do not follow many of the XX-century doctrines, authors remain silenced.

You need to un-silence them yourself.

"Other"

The blank box on official forms has been a constant reminder that, as a teenage girl from Central Asia, I remain invisible in a world quick to categorize and define identities. Checking "other" became second nature, followed by the familiar struggle to explain myself as an enigma from a region unknown. These experiences fueled my core values of diversity, inclusion, and justice—fighting for visibility and empowerment where little exists.

One insight struck me as a child: if I couldn't fill out simple forms, others likely faced

greater barriers. I started a school club to celebrate Central Asian arts, food, and issues, witnessing pride ignited in my community and bridges built with outsiders glimpsing our world. Hosting events showed me how to empower the invisible by making them visible.

Vulnerability came from admitting on college applications that no box fit my identity. Speaking my truth—and the discrimination and obstacles that came with it—brought opportunity. The admission officer understood and committed to improving accessibility. This taught me that compassionate truth can drive change.

My passion is empowering unheard voices through social business ventures. A business degree would provide the skills and network to launch companies that give opportunities to overlooked groups. My identity provides a unique perspective to uplift others facing barriers from a lack of visibility or understanding.

I want to use my experiences to share stories that make the invisible visible, creating a just world. One day, no child will know the struggle of checking "Other" or grappling to explain an identity ignored. One day, empowerment and opportunity will not be limited by borders of gender, ethnicity, or geography. One day, the voices of the unheard will rise in a chorus of shared humanity.

While my path has not always been clear, my purpose has remained steadfast. I was born into a world quick to define me by borders and labels. But the human spirit cannot be so easily contained. My identity is my strength, my struggles are a source of compassion, and my vision is to build understanding for all.

The spaces that sought to confine me will be filled by the stories I live to tell. This is my promise for impact, my vision for the future, and the dream I carry for a world where humanity is defined not by division but by unity within our diversity.

By empowering others to see themselves in me, I reclaim my identity and make visible the shared experiences that bind us. This is the change I want to create. My journey is personal, and my destination is shared. I live to build bridges where only borders stood before.

My path is one of empowerment through understanding—first finding my own voice, then amplifying the voices of others. Bit by bit, a more just world is built not through grand gestures but through acts of compassion. The stories I have lived and the stories I long to tell are my contribution to the shared vision of humanity that seeks to define us: our shared hopes, struggles, and destiny.

This purpose, this promise, and this future I see unfolding step by step, starting from a world that did not make room for a girl like me toward a world where all have space to share their story and shape a collective vision of justice, empowerment, and understanding across all borders. This is the impact I aim to have, the purpose I was born to fulfill, and the promise of a shared humanity I strive to reveal.



"I feel invisible"



Combating Educational Inequity: Paving the Way for Universal Access to Education

By Loraine Olivera

Within contemporary society, education is often heralded as the great equalizer, serving as the conduit for personal development, socioeconomic mobility, and a promising future. However, beneath this notion lies an uncompromising reality: the presence of social injustice within the educational sphere. This all-encompassing predicament obstructs the pathway of countless individuals, particularly those hailing from marginalized communities, impeding their access to quality education and inhibiting the realization of their utmost potential. In this blog entry, we will meticulously dissect the multifarious dimensions of social injustice in education and elucidate the pressing necessity for transformative change.

- **Disparity in Educational Access:**

Foremost among the myriad facets of social injustice in education is the glaring inequality pertaining to educational opportunities. Disadvantaged communities, oft burdened by destitution, grapple with the paucity of resources and infrastructure necessary to furnish their students with superlative education. Insufficient financial provisions, decrepit educational institutions, and limited technological accessibility yield substantial discrepancies in educational outcomes. Consequently, marginalized students find themselves encumbered by systemic barriers that stymie their scholastic triumph from tender ages.

- **Disproportionate Disciplinary Practices:**

An additional disquieting quandary that permeates the educational landscape is the disproportionate imposition of disciplinary measures upon minority students. Persistent studies consistently unearth the reality that students of color, particularly those of African American and Hispanic descent, confront inordinately severe disciplinary consequences compared to their Caucasian peers for analogous infractions. This prejudicial practice, steeped in discrimination, perpetuates the pernicious cycle of the school-to-prison pipeline, perpetuating the entanglement of poverty and criminalization rather than fostering an environment conducive to growth and erudition.

- **Inadequate Support for Students with Special Needs:**

Moreover, the educational system persistently fails to adequately accommodate the unique requirements of students with disabilities.

Scant resources, substandard teacher training, and the dearth of integrative measures and provisions impede the progress of these students. Consequently, they are oft denied the opportunity to realize their full potential, compelled to confront supplementary obstacles on their educational odyssey.

- **Educational Disparities in Rural Enclaves:**

Regrettably, rural communities are frequently disregarded in the endeavor to redress educational disparities. These regions oft grapple with restricted access to exceptional educators, antiquated curricula, and deficient infrastructure. Consequently, students within rural schools find themselves at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their urban counterparts, hindering their scholarly maturation and compromising their future prospects.

- **Socioeconomic Discrepancies in Academic Attainment:**

Social injustice in education engenders a stark socioeconomic chasm. Students hailing from low-income backgrounds oft encounter deprivation in terms of the resources, guidance, and support indispensable for their academic prowess. Absent access to tutors, extracurricular engagements, or enriching programs, these students confront arduous impediments in their pursuit of higher education or vocational aspirations, thus accentuating existing societal disparities.

To confront social injustice in education, a comprehensive and multifaceted approach is exigent. This endeavor necessitates augmented investment in underprivileged schools, equitably disseminated resources, and the implementation of inclusive policies fostering a supportive and nurturing milieu conducive to learning for all students. Additionally, educators and administrators must undergo training to discern and dismantle biases perpetuating discriminatory disciplinary practices and provisions for special education. Solely through collective exertions can we engender equitable access to quality education, empowering individuals from all walks of life to extricate themselves from the fetters of social injustice and unlock their boundless potential. Let us unite in the pursuit of an educational system that authentically serves as the catalyst for a just and egalitarian society.

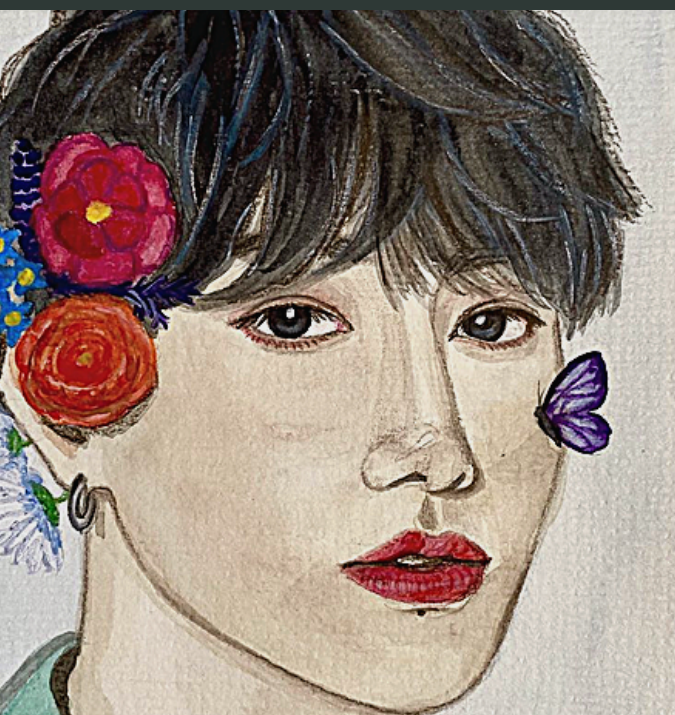


SNOWWDI:

The Girl Hated for Her Passion

Written by Kris Lorie

Art by Snowwdi



Imagine feeling completely isolated and ostracized in school, all because of your love for art and your favorite subjects to draw. Have you ever been so passionate about something, only to be ridiculed and criticized for it? What does it say about the people around you when they cannot appreciate and support your creative pursuits?

This is the story of Dina, a young girl with a beautiful talent, who was shunned by her peers for her love of drawing Korean idols. I had the opportunity to sit down with her and learn more about her experience, her passion, and her journey to acceptance and self-discovery.

Dina, or as her online followers know her, "Snowwdi," has always been an introverted and creative soul. From a young age, she found solace in the world of art. It was a place where she could express herself freely and escape the pressures and judgments of the outside world. But what set Dina apart from her classmates was her choice of subject matter.

As a die-hard fan of Korean pop music, or K-pop, Dina was captivated by the stunning visuals and intricate performances of her favorite idols. It was only natural for her to combine her love for drawing with her passion for K-pop. But little did she know that this decision would turn her entire world upside down.





But why were her classmates so quick to judge and dismiss her artwork? Were they genuinely concerned for her well-being, or were they simply projecting their own insecurities and prejudices onto her passion? And what does it say about the world we live in when someone is ridiculed for expressing themselves through art?

It's important to understand that Dina's love for drawing Korean idols was not just a passing whim or superficial obsession. It was a deep, emotional connection to a culture that resonated with her on a personal level. K-pop was more than just catchy tunes and flashy outfits; it was a form of self-expression and identity for Dina.



As she poured her heart and soul into her artwork, Dina began to develop a following online. Fans from all over the world admired her intricate and beautiful depictions of their favorite K-pop stars. They would shower her with praise and support, validating her talent and passion for art.

But this newfound success only seemed to fuel the resentment and animosity of her classmates. They would scoff at her online presence, saying things like, "You're only popular because you draw those stupid Korean guys." It was as if they couldn't accept the fact that someone they had deemed "weird" and "nerdy" was actually finding success and recognition for her talents.



But Dina was not one to back down from her passion. She refused to let the negativity of her classmates dictate her life and her art. As she continued to draw and share her work online, she began to realize something important: her true strength lay in her ability to persevere, even in the face of adversity.

It's a lesson we can all learn from Dina's story. When faced with criticism and ridicule, it's all too easy to give up on our passions and dreams. But if we dig deep and find the strength to push through, we can discover our true potential and achieve greatness.



So, what happened to Dina? How did she overcome the hatred and negativity that surrounded her?

Dina decided to take a stand. She began to share her story and experiences with her online followers, opening up about the bullying and judgment she faced in school. As her story spread, it touched the hearts of thousands of people who could relate to her struggle and empathize with her pain.

Her bravery and resilience inspired countless others to speak up about their own experiences with bullying and to support one another in their creative pursuits. In the face of adversity, Dina had managed to create a community of love, support, and understanding.

Today, Dina continues to draw and share her artwork with her growing fanbase. She has become a symbol of strength and perseverance for those who have faced bullying and judgment for their passions. And while her classmates may still not understand or appreciate her love for drawing Korean idols, Dina has found a global family who not only accepts her but celebrates and cherishes her unique talent.

In the end, Dina's story is one of hope and triumph. It serves as a powerful reminder that when we choose to embrace our passions and stay true to ourselves, we can overcome even the most daunting obstacles. And perhaps, more importantly, it shows us that the world is full of people who will appreciate and support us, even when those closest to us do not.

In conclusion, Dina's story is not just about a girl who was hated for her passion for drawing Korean idols. It's a testament to the power of perseverance, self-discovery, and the importance of finding your tribe. So, let us all take a page from Snowwdi's book and embrace our passions, stand up to judgment and ridicule, and celebrate the beauty of our unique talents and interests. And who knows? Maybe we'll find our own global family, just like Dina did.



SOCIAL

Social justice refers to the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within society. It is concerned with promoting equal access to basic human rights, such as education, healthcare, and housing, regardless of a person's race, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status.

JUSTICE

Social justice also seeks to challenge and address systemic inequalities and discrimination that contribute to the marginalization of certain groups within society. It is a fundamental principle of a just and democratic society, and is often pursued through advocacy efforts.

THE CATALYST

fight for social justice