

The Witness

Theme: Ranresh is terrified of ‘The Gang’ and gets attacked on the way home from school. Hannah is a witness but she is afraid to do anything about it. At last she finds the courage to be part of the solution rather than being part of the problem.

Setting: School

SEAL reference: Say No to Bullying

Ranresh sat at the back of the classroom watching... listening... Was this the day that he would really find out why the ‘bullies’ in Class 5 always picked on him.

He didn’t hold out much hope. He had been here so many times before. He could probably write a book on how many times he had been bullied, there were so many! The only problem was that there seemed no way out, at least not for him.

He risked a sneaky look at the leader of ‘The Gang’.

Harjeet!

Ranresh was so scared of him that he had to breathe deeply even before he dare turn his head towards him. When he did, Harjeet was looking straight back at him!

Ranresh’s hands were sweaty and his heart began to thump. Harjeet had a vile sly grin on his face.

‘He knows I’m scared,’ thought Ranresh. He knows and he is enjoying it.

Fear now ran through Ranresh’s whole body, even though he knew he was safe in the classroom. He tried to breathe slowly and deeply as his Uncle had taught him when he had come

face-to-face with his first snake, during a family visit to India. It didn’t help.

Harjeet, meanwhile, knew exactly what he was doing. He knew that he had pushed Ranresh into being so frightened of ‘The Gang’ that now they didn’t even have to hurt him. The occasional threat: ‘to watch himself on the way home’ or ‘tomorrow might be the day!’ was enough to reduce Ranresh to a trembling wreck.

Harjeet sat back in his chair. ‘Easy!’ he thought.

He was grinning to himself now because he knew that Ranresh was trapped. He was suffering the same fear and helplessness now as if they had actually ‘cornered’ him, which Harjeet still planned to do anyway.

Ranresh’s chest was tight. He felt as though he was suffocating. His face was burning, but his hands and feet were like blocks of ice.

‘Ranresh? Ranresh... can you hear me. Are you alright?’ asked Miss Howard.

Ranresh tried to speak, but his mouth was dry. He tried to smile, but his lips wobbled. He was trying not to cry.

He managed a feeble wave to imply that he was OK – just before everything went black and he fell to the floor.

The class was in uproar, girls shrieking, boys giggling. They thought it was all a great joke. Then the bell rang for afternoon break.

‘Class 5!’ shouted Miss Howard over the noise. ‘Out to play, please!’ She knelt down by Ranresh.

Ranresh tried to get up, but Miss Howard made him stay where he was.

Ranresh did as he was told, he felt too groggy to do anything else. He also felt silly now and he realized there would be questions to answer both here and at home. But he knew he couldn’t tell anyone the truth about ‘The Gang’!

Miss Howard told Ranresh to spend the last lesson in Mrs Hague’s room. This was a quiet place where you

could say what you really felt and no one misunderstood or overreacted. Consequently, when it came to home-time, he was feeling quite calm. He might even get a few days off school as a result of his fainting.

The school secretary arrived, just before the Bell, with a message.

‘Ranresh, your mum’s been in touch. She has to work late today, so your Grandad is going to pick you up. Your mum says you are to start walking to save your Grandad’s legs.’ And with that she turned on her heel and rushed off with her next message.

Mrs Hague watched all the colour drain from Ranresh’s face. He sank back into his chair as if all the wind had been sucked out of him.

‘Are you feeling poorly again, Ranresh. You’ve gone a funny colour. Can I do anything.’

‘No,’ moaned Ranresh on a whisper of breath. ‘No, thank you, Mrs Hague.’

‘I’ll go and get your coat and your book bag for you and I’ll walk you to the gate, maybe your Grandad will be there by then,’ she said.

At the gate, there was no sign of Grandad, so Mrs Hague said, ‘Goodbye’ to Ranresh.

He buttoned up his coat and tied all his books and bags around him. He hoped they might protect him from the onslaught he was expecting. Then, all his preparations made, he decided to run like the wind for as long and as far as he could. Maybe he would get to Grandad before the bullies got to him!



Ranresh wasn't two minutes from the school gate when they pounced!

Hannah saw everything from her bedroom window. She was horrified, but felt she was too far away to help. She was also too afraid to get involved.

So, next morning, she had a terrible shock in Assembly. The Headteacher announced that Ranresh was in hospital. He was very poorly and he said they should all think of him in a time of quiet.

He also added that if anyone had seen or heard anything of the incident last night they should tell him straight after the Assembly.

Hannah was worried. What should she do? Then she remembered what Mrs Hague had often told them. 'If you can't decide what to do, check how you feel inside. If it feels bad; it *is* bad. So tell someone!'

Hannah looked inside herself. She knew why Ranresh had fainted yesterday. She knew about 'The Gang' – all the children did. She knew that bullies rely on everyone's fear to keep them out of trouble.

'But not any more!' thought Hannah. She was suddenly very angry. She had heard them boasting at the school gate that morning about what they had done and how 'safe' they felt.

Hannah found herself walking, no, not walking, storming towards the

Headteacher's office. Outside the Head's door, she didn't hesitate. She gave three loud knocks, waited for a moment, and pushed open the door.

'Why, hello Hannah...' The Headmaster didn't get any further. Hannah's torrent of anger filled the room.

Then there was a pause before Hannah looked the Head straight in the eye... 'And,' she added, 'I don't mind who knows it was me who told you, 'cos I'm not scared of them anymore.'

A few days later she saw Mrs Hague in the corridor. She smiled and gave Hannah the 'Thumbs Up' sign and a big grin. She pointed to the display where she had put up a huge banner that read.

'IF YOU ARE NOT PART OF THE SOLUTION; YOU ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM!'

Hannah gave Mrs Hague a 'high-five' and walked on smiling. She knew which half she was in.

Follow-up questions

- Why is it often so hard to say if you are being bullied?
- What gave Hannah the courage to tell about what she had seen?
- Bullies rely on three things: your fear, your silence and the imbalance of power. Remember, always 'Tell, tell, tell!'