

DIFFERENT=AMAZING

a play for grades 4-6

By Matthew Bennett



PLAN-B
Theatre Company



Matthew Ivan Bennett's DIFFERENT=AMAZING, a collection of five short plays about bullying, received its world premiere as Plan-B Theatre Company's Second Annual Free Elementary School Tour, February 22-May 31, 2014 with an Encore Tour October 6-10, 2014. Directed and designed by Jerry Rapier, artwork by Rick Pollock, featuring Tyson Baker as Actor 1 and Latoya Rhodes as Actor 2.

For production rights please visit <http://www.leicesterbaytheatricals.com/different-equals-amazing/>

CHARACTERS

All roles were originally played by one male (1) and one female (2) actor, but each role could also be cast with a single appropriate actor.

KYLE: A stress case. A tender, hardworking boy of the fifth grade (1)

KIMMY: A mean girl of the fifth grade (2)

SHEENA: A depressed and traumatized sixth-grade girl (2)

MATT: A raconteur recalling how he was bullied in the sixth grade (1)

HELPER: A theatrical go-fer, playing a variety of grade-schoolers (2)

SKYLIE: A third-grade girl who has spurned a friend (2)

PATRICK: A smart boy from an unconventional family; in the fourth grade (1)

KISSA: A fourth-grade immigrant girl who bullies a friend but then apologizes (2)

PLACE

Various school locations, all suggested through speech—only two chairs or a bench are necessary

TIME

Here, now

PROLOGUE

ACTOR 2: We are tall, we are short, we are small, we are big, we are brown and white and black.

ACTOR 1: We are all different from each other.

ACTOR 2: Our eyes can be the color of honey, of rainclouds, of new leaves or river stones.

ACTOR 1: We have thousands of languages; different words to say, "different": diferente, unterschiedlich, kotonaru.

ACTOR 2: We also have different words to say "amazing": asombroso, incroyable, sugoi.

ACTOR 1: So we're different, but the same. Every people in the history of the planet came up with a word for "different," so they could talk about the variety of life.

ACTOR 2: And came up with a word for "amazing."

ACTOR 1: Which they did, in part, to talk about about difference.

ACTOR 2: The difference in the sky when a star falls. The difference in your mouth when you eat a cold orange.

ACTOR 1: The differences among us: in our eyes, our hair, our skin, our voices, our smiles.

ACTOR 2: Sometimes, when we say "different" we mean "bad."

ACTOR 1: But if someone says a difference is bad—

ACTOR 2: Ask yourself: Are they being fair?

ACTOR 1: Sometimes being fair, being humble, being courageous or openhearted can be different.

ACTOR 2: Nothing amazing happens when we're unfair, when we're full of ourselves, when we're cowardly or unthinking or closed-off.

ACTOR 1: But it's the kind of different you want to be.

ACTOR 1 and ACTOR 2: (In unison.) A difference that equals amazing!

ACTOR 2: Now the stories you're about to see are dramatized—some are serious, some aren't—but as you watch, please remember that each one is based on the hardships of real people.

WHAT YOU SHOW TO PEOPLE

(An odd couple of fifth-graders, KIMMY and KYLE, wait to be punished outside the principal's office.)

KIMMY: When the principal gets back, you're gonna get it.

KYLE: You're gonna get it when the principal gets back.

KIMMY: You wish; I didn't do anything.

KYLE: You threw a stapler at my head.

KIMMY: Did you see me throw it?

KYLE: I didn't have to, I know it was you.

KIMMY: —And it was a mini-stapler, by the way.

KYLE: A mini-stapler flicked me in the ear, bounced off the board, 'n I look over, and there's Kimmy Kellenberger, smiling.

KIMMY: So? I like smiling.

KYLE: Well it hasn't helped your face, so maybe you shouldn't.

KIMMY: I have a great face, you're the derp. And you stabbed me with a pencil!

KYLE: I wrote on you.

KIMMY: You assaulted me.

KYLE: Ooo, big word.

KIMMY: This is serious, Kyle, you're gonna grow up 'n be the grimy old man who stabs women in the park.

KYLE: I am not.

KIMMY: You totally are, so enjoy prison.

KYLE: When the principal comes back in I can prove to her that you, Kimmy, threw the stapler. (Using his hand as a smartphone.) I caught it on my iPhone! The Bully Button app. Bam.

KIMMY: . . . That's not an iPhone.

KYLE: Yes it is, it's an old one.

KIMMY: You're such a poser. And I never "bullied" you.

KYLE: I have video evidence this time, Kimmy.

KIMMY: You have a video of you stabbing me—a girl. You hit a girl. Whose side will she be on?

KYLE: I never hit you! You can't say "hit."

KIMMY: I don't have to say it, I can show it, thanks to you. I might have accidentally grazed you with a stapler, as I was returning it, but you abused me.

KYLE: Stop saying that.

KIMMY: Stop hitting girls. "You never hit a girl."

KYLE: Sometimes you do. What if she's possessed by the Devil?

KIMMY: Then you ask the Devil to leave, like a gentleman.

KYLE: I tried that with you, it didn't work: you went and ruined my volcano anyway!

KIMMY: I didn't "ruin" your volcano, I bumped you.

KYLE: On purpose!

KIMMY: Wa.

KYLE: You did!

KIMMY: I bumped you because I tripped, which I'm sure is on your "iPhone," then you went flicking vinegar in my eyes. So go ahead 'n show her how I "bullied" you.

KYLE: Oh man! You always get what you want.

KIMMY: No, I don't.

KYLE: Yes you do. One: when you stole my chicken nuggets on Wednesday and I complained to the monitor you said I gave them to you with the barbecue sauce and she sided with you.

KIMMY: It was my understanding they were a gift.

KYLE: You ripped a piece of chicken out of my mouth. Two! A month ago in gym, in front of Mrs. Klein and pretty much everyone, you said my sweater was my grandma's.

KIMMY: You were wearing a sweater in gym.

KYLE: A boy's sweater.

KIMMY: With a chorus line of penguins?

KYLE: It's boy clothing; it came from JC Penny's, all right?

KIMMY: I believe that, but where inside JC Penny's? What department? That's the mystery.

KYLE: The mystery is how you can get whatever you want. You make all this fun of me, Scot free, 'n all Mrs. Klein says is "Ha Ha, Kimmy."

KIMMY: Ugh, you're such a whiner.

KYLE: The whole fifth grade is calling me the Old Fart.

KIMMY: Well, if you hadn't farted during ping-pong . . . (Makes a squeaking sound.)

KYLE: —I DIDN'T! My shoe squeaked on the floor! Geez! Do you have a nice bone in your body? 'Cause I think really really, underneath—

KIMMY: I think I'm not going to get suspended over a little whiner! You wrecked the volcano, you stabbed me, you are going to pay the price for this, OK derp? ... Did you hear me, derp?

KYLE: I'm not who's guilty, Kimmy.

KIMMY: They don't care, derp. They care if you broke a rule, that's it. And they don't believe you when you whine like a wet kitten. So you can't beat me, all right?

KYLE: I wasn't trying to fight with you. Why do we have to be in a fight?

KIMMY: Why do countries have fights? Some are cool, some aren't. 'N whether you meant to be, you're in one; it's all a big fight. And you're losing, by making a bunch of us hate you.

KYLE: What "bunch of us"? No one else is this mean. You mean you.

KIMMY: Actually, no, I don't, 'cause I don't care enough about you to hate you.

KYLE: If you don't "care enough," then why'd you huck a mini stapler at my head?

KIMMY: Because it's fun. That's why. It's fun.

KYLE: I don't believe you. You're full of it. Fun? Was it fun ripping up my Valentine's card?

KIMMY: Sorry what?

KYLE: Don't pretend. On Valentine's last year I gave you a valentine? I spent a lot of time on it; I used three hot glue sticks and a bag of Red Hots, which were not on sale, and I drew a maze on the back, the card said "You're a-maze-ing," I know you remember.

KIMMY: Well, I don't, I get a lot of valentines.

KYLE: But this one you smashed, with your snow boots, then you spit on it, then you flung it in the garbage. Was that fun?

KIMMY: I can't even picture what you're whining about.

KYLE: Really. 'Cause you started smashing it in front of my desk, so everyone knew, but then!, a couple minutes after bell I saw you digging it out of the garbage can.

KIMMY: What?! Gross. No you didn't.

KYLE: Well, I saw you, and you didn't see me, and you can't make-believe anymore, Kimmy. I saw you! And since then I've been wondering: Does she really really hate me, or is she afraid to say she doesn't 'cause I'm not "cool"? So I keep on being nice to you, thinking you'll be different, and you keep on being mean, but I know.

KIMMY: You don't know crap.

KYLE: I know you aren't what you show to people! I know your dad forgot to pick you up yesterday and you were bawling.

KIMMY: Shut up.

KYLE: I saw, Kimmy. And I've seen more.

KIMMY: (grabbing him; making a fist)

Well there's a lot more you don't see.

KYLE: —I've seen your blog, where you said "If I got one wish, I'd get a different dad."

KIMMY: Why are you reading my blog?!

KYLE: Anyone can read it.

KIMMY: Well it's not for you.

KYLE: Who's it for then?

KIMMY: Not for derps like you.

KYLE: A derp who takes the time to talk to you about it? When you're pretty much a jerk?!

KIMMY: You don't know half my problems, Kyle! And if you did . . . ! . . . If you did then you wouldn't want to be my Valentine, OK? So shut up.

KYLE: . . . It can't be that bad. What is it?

KIMMY: It's that bad. Divorce.

KYLE: Oh. Man . . . But hey, when someone really really cares about you nothing can make 'em stop, right?

KIMMY: In a perfect world maybe.

KYLE: Well I don't think so in this world.

KIMMY: Great. Whatever.

KYLE: Not whatever. You don't get to choose if a person cares about you. Like, say, with us—

KIMMY: Got it. Thanks. Thank you. I still don't like you. I do like your art.

KYLE: You do?

KIMMY: Yes, ugh, but that's it. You draw good. Don't get ideas. I mean, thanks for caring, but don't expect me to care that you care because you're too different. Nothing is happening here. We're just sitting, 'til the principal comes, at which point . . . ! Ugh! At which point, I'll tell her the truth.

KYLE: You will?

KIMMY: I threw the mini-stapler and you stabbed me.

KYLE: Deal.

KIMMY: And if you feel like I "bullied" you, then I'm sorry that you're so sensitive that you have those feelings.

KYLE: . . . If that's an apology then I accept.

KIMMY: OK. But just so we're clear: I don't like you. At all. I only like your mazes. OK? 'N you can draw me more—if you start standing up for yourself.

KYLE: I will if you show your real self more.

KIMMY: Fine. I show more, you show less.

KYLE: No, that's not the promise!

KIMMY: —I'm kidding, geez, chill. Adult humor.

KYLE: Oh, right, I knew that.

KIMMY: —Shh, I think the principal's coming. (They listen, afraid. High heels click in the tiled hallway. They whisper; their last moments on Earth.)

KYLE: Oh this is gonna be bad. Even her walk sounds angry. Can you hear that? I'm in deep.

KIMMY: No. We're both in deep. We're in deep together. Right?

KYLE: . . . Right. (They listen, and wait, their hearts speeding up.)

IT'S NOT SAFE TO FEEL

An eleven-year-old girl, SHEENA, facing a therapist.

I don't feel anything. Just annoyed. And I don't think I need a therapist over that, what's there to say? I expect to be hurt. If we meet in the halls, then I'll be tripped, or shoved, or flicked; they'll scratch my arm, stomp on my foot, spit gum in my hair; pants me. So what? I don't like it. So I lay there 'til my mom yells, Getta move on, and I have the melt downs in the bathroom, but that's what the medicine's for, right? You can't change the way you are, so what's there to work on? They all say, You look like a dummy, 'cause my ears are so big—but I can't change 'em. Unless I cut 'em off. So yes, I get tired, or freak out—except on weekends, 'cause I like Saturday morning cartoons, and church's OK—but why even try? They don't give a crap if I shower or comb my hair right. I feel their eyes on me no matter what—in the hallways, or when we're lining up for lunch, and I'm a rabbit, and they're dogs, following me, sniffing; they say I stink so they sniff me, watch me, wait for teachers to turn the other way, and my heart goes, but I never run. Why run? If I run, or get mad, 'cause they slap my books away or steal my stuff or hit me in the privates—which they did!—then just they say my face looks like mud. So I stopped feeling mad. . . . I'm still scared, sometimes. Of Rosa; I pretty much hate her guts and wouldn't care if anything bad happened to her, but I won't show her how I feel because she laughs harder. Kicks my ankles, my shins, and she laughs—and she plays soccer, so she wears cleats and it scrapes my skin, I bleed in my socks, but I've already said it to teachers and nothing. My dad sees me throwing socks in the garbage and all he does is teach me "how to punch," which, if I did, would only get me in trouble; says, Be like your brother. Wants me to join the army when I'm older, 'cause that'll be amazing. So I wear two pairs of socks as padding, 'n it doesn't help—'n my mom tells me not to wear two pairs anyway—so I expect to be hurt, because I'm different. Even though it's not very much. But why talk? When it stays the same? When my mom drops me off and I hustle 'cause the bell's about to ring and the grass is wet, and my shoes're soaked, and Rosa bulldozes me as hard as she can? And I don't even see her 'til I'm rolling on the grass and my leggings rip on a sprinkler and scrapes me and I hear her laugh? When my mom sees, and flies out of the car, and tears Rosa a new one and we rush up to the principal's office and the principal doesn't even believe that a girl would do that? After we talked about everything? When she calls up my mom during dinner time and it's "Well, it's her word against yours, and hers against your daughter's and Rosa's such a good student while your

daughter..."? Which is bull, 'cause four people saw her hurt me 'n my grades are better. But so what? They won't say anything; I asked Pam and Rachel Reynolds but they said Rosa would hurt them back. And the other two? Rosa's friends. So I don't feel anything, except when I melt down, 'cause it all stays the same, and they'll turn anything you feel into a joke. It's not safe to feel. I don't have any feelings to talk about. Can I go now? (She stares down the therapist.)

GET UP AGAIN

Adult MATT and his HELPER.

HELPER: The next piece, although ridiculous, is also based on a true story. The year was 1988.

MATT: Yes, and I was on the playground during first recess, pretending to be a ninja. A giant turtle ninja. With nunchucks. (HELPER demonstrates.) I played by myself a lot. But I didn't mind—solitude is like a lump of sugar in the Shredded Wheat of victory against an army of robots. So I'm in the middle of a drop kick, my Converse dislocating the jaw of an invisible evil can-opener, and then they see me and I see them. I recognize them across the unmown grass. Shawn and Vic. Vic and Shawn. Stronger than me, faster than me, exponentially more body hair than me. I'm in deep. We're at the edge of the field. No one's around. The teacher on duty is reading a "romance" novel in the distance. They veer in the direction of my imaginary rooftop and I stand still. I consider trying to look like I'm doing calisthenics, but my leg's already angry at me for the dropkick. So I stand there, my blood pressure dancing, until they arrive. Shawn has a blond bowl cut, blue-gray eyes, and his face is a freckle farm. He wears white jeans. Vic, he's got a Def Leppard T-shirt, which I'm a little jealous of, and a raven black mullet—which I'm a lot jealous of. Shawn says:

HELPER: "Awesome sweatshirt, Mattheewww."

MATT: I look down. I have on a carnation pink sweatshirt. I thought they were coming to critique my Kung Fu, but it was my fashion sense. Not that I blame them. A pink sweatshirt on a stick like me conjures the image of a tropical punch Otter Pop. I was like a flamingo doing a Bruce Lee impression. But be that as it may, I was not without pride. I was a short, skinny, hairless, pink, Otter Pop with pride. Shawn says to me:

HELPER: "You look like a white trash Barbie."

MATT: Vic says:

HELPER: "Did you get that out of your mom's closet?"

MATT: —And I almost shoot back, No, out of my sister's! But since that was true I keep it inside.

HELPER: "Do you like being a girl?"

MATT: Shawn says, and I say, "No, because I'm not one." Vic says:

HELPER: "Then why're you wearing makeup?"

MATT: Shawn says:

HELPER: "That's weird, you have hair like a girl."

MATT: "You have lips like a girl!" Which was generally true: they were very full. He responds:

HELPER: "Does that mean you want to kiss me?"

MATT: —"I wouldn't even fart on you!" I say. Shawn's face falls; it morphs into a single, monstrous freckle; his yuppie voice burns:

HELPER: "Fine. I'd never let a girl fart on me anyway."

MATT: And then I see that there's a choice before me. I back out of this, bow to the Alpha, suffer the Dead Arm and the Noogie, or I roll the dice—and I do!—and I say this: (To HELPER.) "But you'd let a boy fart on you?" (To audience.) I throw the verbal icosahedron and it comes up 20! Damage 1d8 plus 1 for magical cold! Uhn! Sneak attack 3d6 'cause I play DnD, sucka: Ahh! And then it's his turn:

HELPER: "You're dead, freak. After school. Meet me at the hole in the back fence."

MATT: "I'll be there. With a pink sweatshirt on." (To audience.) BUT WHAT THE 'H'-'E'-DOUBLE HOCKEY STICKS AM I DOING?!, I think! It's Shawn and Vic! The guys who wore white tuxedos to our sixth grade social and got away with it! They know how to breakdance! (HELPER demonstrates.) I'm screwed! Lunchtime comes. I realize fully my predicament. I ask for an extra helping of spinach from the scary lunch lady; I need vitamins and minerals. She inexplicably pities me with a sopping green scoop. I consult with my best buddy Brent. (To HELPER.) "Brent, you gotta help me."

HELPER: "What am I going to do, shake my dandruff on them?"

MATT: No, Brent can't help me! He's a broomstick with eyeglasses and eczema!

HELPER: "I'll be there for moral support if I can go in disguise."

MATT: —There's no one who can save me. I have to walk alone. I'm the one that turned a fart joke around on a jock. I'm the one that borrowed my sister's pink sweatshirt. Me!—And then the hour comes. I'm standing by the hole in the back fence. Brent is twenty yards off with binoculars. I'm doing calisthenics for real. Shawn and Vic swagger to the fence like Darth Vader twins and a crowd spontaneously gathers.

HELPER: (A Valley Girl.) "Like, oh my dog, what's going on here?"

MATT: (To the Valley Girl.) "Shawn doesn't like a man in pink."

HELPER: "What man?"

MATT: "Me."

HELPER: "Oh."

MATT: A circle forms. Shawn and I square off inside of it. He says:

HELPER: "Don't mind if I punch you in your craw do you?"

MATT: —And then . . . he creams me. (HELPER is still.) Annihilates me. I'm on the grass inside of ten seconds. I get up and he drags me into the chain link fence and knees me in the face a bunch of times. I get up and he tackles me. I get up and he knocks the wind out of me. I swing and miss and he trips me. Brent doesn't do anything. The crowd doesn't do anything, except for stare. My punches land like pillows are tied to my fists and his punches are like bricks and down I go . . . But I get up again. The world looking wet, cheekbones throbbing, ears ringing, nose hot and gushing, I get up again.

HELPER: "Stay down, freak!"

MATT: I think he tells me to stay down but, hey, my ears ringing and I can't hear so well. I look at myself. I taste copper. The pink sweatshirt is dotted all with red. Which makes me very, very mad. Shawn closes in! He postures. I mentally prepare for the knuckle sandwich.

HELPER: "I said stay down, Matt!"

MATT: He pulls back for a right cross, but in the same instant, the playground flash-frozen, I have an epiphany: Bloody. Snot. Is. Gross. (Slow-mo HELPER.) Armed with this amazing wisdom, I thrust my nose up as Shawn's fist is about to begin its terrible forward trajectory . . . and I blow. (He does.) I blow and I think of Niagara Falls! I blow and I imagine Mrs. Butterworth destroyed by a cherry bomb! I blow and I splatter Shawn with my crimson sinus syrup, hoping for the gore to fly down his villainous gullet! (HELPER gags.) The Valley Girl says:

HELPER: "G-ross!"

MATT: Brent drops his binoculars and applauds. And Shawn says, his white pants a little different now:

HELPER: "You're a psycho, dude."

MATT: I say: "A psycho who likes pink." And he backs away. Well, he walks away normally; but he leaves, along with Vic, and the crowd disperses, seeming somewhat ashamed. I sniff back a shot of blood and I collect my purple and silver backpack. The sky is overcast and my hands are stiff from the fight and the chill. Next to Brent, I ache three blocks home in a silence punctuated only twice:

HELPER: "I think you won."

MATT: "I think I have a loose molar." Looking back, I wouldn't change a thing. Yes, I took a magnificent beating. But I got up again.

HELPER: And, blew your snot on a bully.

MATT: Yes, and that strategy serves me today...in a manner of speaking.

MATT and HELPER: (In unison.) True story.

THERE WAS THIS GIRL

A third-grader, SKYLIE.

There was this girl that was fat. She used to be my friend. Outside of the building they teased her—because she was fat. She was smart too. When it came to English she was amazing. But they didn't like her because she was a different size. And 'cause they said Rhianne liked to wear clothes with fairies on 'em. Like Tinkerbell? But it was mostly because of her stomach . . . This group of boys—it was always this one group of boys; fifth-graders was the ones that did it. Travis and Danny Lindley, and Jacob. They pushed her in the mud by the big tree, especially when it was raining, and she always went home dirty. I seen them do it, and she yelled for help, but I never would. I wanted to, but I thought that Travis would make me eat mud. He said, If you help her, or say something, then I'll make you lick the mud off my fingers, Skyliel! They wouldn't even let me give her my hand so she could get up off the ground. So I never helped . . . And then the boys was starting to call her Pig, and Pig Face, every day. And tell her that she was a pig face when she was in the mud. So she got a break from school. She faked that she was sick for two days. She messaged me and told me when she was in bed. And when she was gone, Travis and Danny Lindley came up to me on the monkey bars and said, Why are you even friends with Fatty? And I said, I don't know. Then they said on the in'ernet, Skyliel isn't your real friend, pig. And I seen it, but I didn't message her or call her house or say it was a lie. The next day she went—Rhianne haddel to, because her mom took her to the doctor and the doctor said that she wasn't sick so she haddel to go back—and Rhianne asked me, Is it true? Are you really just my enemy? And I didn't say anything, because I was so tired of Travis bugging me, and other people wouldn't talk to me because I was "The Pig's" friend. So I didn't say anything and Rhianne's face went white and she started saying I was worse than they was as she was crying and the boys come up, like they knew: Why didn't you come to school, Rhianne? We have a surprise for you. But she kept looking at me till the bell rang . . . At recess she stayed at her desk with her head down and I still didn't say anything. I played Lava on the bars with Jessica. Where you pretend all the ground is lava? But the whole time I was thinking that the ground was the Pig . . . After school I seen Rhianne surrounded by the boys. They hult buckets full of mud that they hid. Jacob's bucket was like a sandcastle one, and red, except he put a rock in with his mud and when they threw all the mud on her the rock cut part of Rhianne's eye. I sat there with Jessica and didn't do anything—because she wasn't my friend anymore; she was just a fat girl. All the way from where I was on the grass I could hear

Rhianne crying and Travis going like, Why don't you just fall down a sewer and then stay there so no one will have to worry about you anymore? But I pretended it was her fault . . . In the morning, I got called to the principal's. Rhianne was there with her mom and the principal, and Rhianne was wearing an eye patch, and the principal wanted to me to say what I knew. I looked at Rhianne, but she wouldn't look at me and I felt like I was Travis. I told everything about the Lindleys calling her Pig Face and what happened by the cottonwood tree, but Rhianne still wouldn't look. The principal said, Do you have proof? to Rhianne and her mom and they showed him on her laptop all the messages. So he asks me about the message that says "Skyly isn't yer real friend, pig." And I say, I never seen it, 'cause I didn't want to be in trouble, and Rhianne yells I'm a liar. So the principal sent me back, because I'm not a bully but maybe just a liar, and the next day Rhianne wasn't at her desk—her mom moved her to a different school. The boys got expelled, but Rhianne still didn't want to come back . . . Because of me.

THAT'S NOT MY NAME

Fourth-graders PATRICK and KISSA (pronounced Kiss-SAH).

PATRICK: It's winter, after school; gray out—and when I see they're behind me by the Taco Time, I think Oh yay, here we go again, four against one today, 'n I put my Silly Putty in my pocket 'n hurry across the street. Only, they run across too, right into traffic, so it's either run back, or keep straight, or try and lose 'em in the neighborhoods. 'N my friend Kevin's apartment is close by so I do that, cutting through a dog park next to the apartments but, I should've stuck to the road, 'cause they catch up at the park—right as my asthma's bugging me. Christopher calls over, "Hey, Patty! We've got a secret we wanna share with you!" And inside I'm going, Why does he think that's going to work?, but I say, "That's not my name. My name's Patrick; it's not Patty." I breathe out. Slowly. I was hoping a bunch of adults would be in the park with some pitbulls, but it's two skinny kids—second-graders—trying to get a water rocket more than five feet off the grass. But, I say it's not Patty, and then Christopher comes up to me, ten feet away: "Oh, I'm sorry, Patricia. Come'ere." I look at their hands; they're all in their coat pockets or behind their backs. I can't see what they've got but they're all grinning with their teeth. It's Christopher, Tommy, and Katie. And Kissa, who I actually like. She's quiet, like me, 'n at the start of the year we were friends. I met her when we were lined up for class one morning. (To KISSA, in memory.) Hey. Are you new?

KISSA: What is "new"? I not know this word.

PATRICK: Whoa. You're really really new.

KISSA: I speak English a little only. What is "new"?

PATRICK : Oh, it's not a bad thing; it means you haven't come to this school before. I'm Patrick.

KISSA: Patrick?

PATRICK: Yeah. Just imagine me wearing an eyepatch, with rickets. Patch-Rickets; Patrick. (Beat. A pirate gesture.) Argh. (She stares.) Sorry, that was weird—I'm into memory games.—So you're new here? Obviously.

KISSA: Yes. Yes. I am new. I thank you.

PATRICK: You're welcome. But you only have to say thank you, not I thank you. I don't know why; it's weird. When you say "She thanked him" you say she but when you're thanking somebody you don't say I just thank you. Maybe 'cause it's obvious who's thanking.

KISSA: Ah. Yes. I . . . Thank you.

PATRICK: See! She's cool. She came to the US from Uganda, because her mom didn't like the government—or else they didn't like her. 'N I tried helping her 'cause on the first day these kids were saying her skin was ugly, 'n how her hair was like wires. 'N I have a brother who's adopted, and black, so I knew how much that hurt, and I said, So what?, she's different, but she's amazing! I think...she's cute! But they said, Who cares about you and Christopher's all "Patty has a crush on her, Patty has a crush on her," which is bull, but then, before much longer, Kissa was hanging out with him, Christopher!, who even went and called her an FOB! "Fresh off the boat." So: I'm facing them in the park, in the snow. Christopher, Tommy, and Katie. And Kissa. And it's not fair 'cause Christopher's two hands taller than me, and Katie's taller than him. She beats everyone at running and can flick your ear from five feet away. She lugs all her books home in her shiny yellow backpack, every day, and she isn't slowed down by the weight. Then there's Tommy, who looks like a tank with red hair and bug eyes; he could get in the Guinness Book of World Records as the Champion of Spit-Balling, easy. So I face them, in the cold, and and I try to do what my mom practiced with me: I breathe out, for the asthma, and I say, "Guys, would you just tell me what your problem is?" And Christopher goes, "We don't have a problem, Patricia, we came to give you a present." 'N he says it so nicely that I get goosebumps on my arm, 'cause Christopher's only nice when others are watching, and no one's watching except his goons. I say, "Let me guess? I'm a loser and a four-eyes. I suck. All of you are the best ever and I'm a little squeaker, who sucks." Christopher fakes a run. I jump; my breath fogs up in front of me. But I try to do what my mom said: "You all think you have a problem with me, but you only have a problem with yourselves!" They split up, surrounding me. I want more than anything for some stranger to shout, Leave him alone!, but it's late and below-freezing and gray and even the boys with the broken water rocket tear off. I turn, and turn, as they circle me with their hands in their coats. I try to feel empty, but my eyes burn. I don't cry, but seeing Kissa strut around me, when I never did anything bad to her, makes me shake, and remember the last day of being friends, when I stopped her by the bus. (To KISSA; in memory.) Hey, Kissa! Hi. Doyoustillwanttocomeoversometime? 'Cause my mom says today 'til 4:30 would be OK.

KISSA: I can not today, I am sorry.

PATRICK: That's cool. Whenever. Wanna see a trick? The rubber band's on all four fingers, right? (A mimed trick gone wrong.) Cool, huh? ... Could you come over tomorrow?

KISSA: I can not tomorrow. No.

PATRICK: OK. Just . . . Are you mad at me?

KISSA: No. I feel nothing for you.

PATRICK: . . . What does that mean?

KISSA: You speak English, you know what.

PATRICK: Did Christopher say some stuff about me?

KISSA: Yes. And now I know what you are.

PATRICK: What I am? What am I?

KISSA: I think you know what.

PATRICK: But I didn't know. All I knew was Christopher saying I do everything like a girl. So, when Kissa struts around me in the snow, and I'm shaking, I'm still confused, and I still want her as a friend, so I shout: "You could stop this...Kissa! You're only going along with him...because he's big! But you don't need him! You're different, and amazing, and pretty, and you used to be fun...and you're better!" But she only struts, her face hard. I stare back, hoping, pleading without any words. For a half-second she seems ashamed, maybe, but in the corner of my eye I see Christopher throw!—or I think he's throwing, but he's only faking again. Nothing hits me. But now in his hand I see a red water balloon the size of a fist. He says, "Think fast," and fakes again, but I don't flinch this time. I stop turning to see them all. And I say, my face getting hot, "None of you are funny. Calling me 'Patty' isn't funny. Playing 'Patty Touch' isn't funny; I don't have any diseases! Sitting down during a soccer game doesn't make me a girl." Blam! Tommy hits me with a balloon in the leg. But it isn't water. It's paint, yellow paint. Blam! Another balloon breaks, Katie's; pink splashes across my right shoulder, onto my neck, my jaw. Blam! Christopher smacks me square in the chest with a paint bomb that's green as a lima bean. My clothes are ruined and my eyes are wet. I'm breathing deep on purpose so I won't sob. Tommy and Katie and Christopher are whooping and: Ah ha ha ha ha! Christopher goes, "You like rainbows, don't you, Patty?!" I don't say anything. I wait for a fourth balloon, Kissa's, but over to the right she's dead still. "Throw it," Christopher laughs. But a few seconds go by and Kissa's like a statue, not looking at me, or them. The laughter winds down and echoes on the snow and houses. "Throw it," he says again . . . Throw it!" . . . But, she doesn't. She drops the balloon on the dirty snowpack; it flops around, unbroken, and Kissa walks away across the field. (KISSA walks away.) Not a word; not a look. Christopher, his hook nose crinkling, watches her walk away for a long ten seconds. Tommy watches Christopher, wondering what to do. Katie's like: "Bok, bok bok bok bok" to Kissa. And then Christopher stares flat into me, as he crunches over to the last

water balloon and lines up a kick between me and the balloon. Trying to make a big show, he winks at me, but I can tell he's not enjoying himself now. He kicks . . . and the balloon splats to the side of me, missing by inches. With a smile more like a scowl, Christopher shrugs at the blue mess in the snow and says to Tommy and Katie, "This's dumb. What are you thinking?" But they aren't, I guess; they only shrug. Christopher says, "I think Little Patty wants to be alone with his rainbow," and I tell them: "Just so you know . . . I won't keep quiet. Not this time." Tommy blurts out, "We're not on school property, fruitcake," and I say, "Doesn't matter." Christopher fakes a run at me, again. I don't jump. And they leave. Scooping up some blue-painted snow, Christopher peps me in the ear, says "Bye, Patty," and they leave . . . I tell my mother; I tell my teacher; I tell the principal; even though I don't want to, I tell. Christopher, Tommy and Katie are suspended for three days—and then a week later, during recess, Kissa sits by me on the slope. Usually it's all snow, but this day, it's grass, brown and dry, and Kissa says to me:

KISSA: . . . Hi.

PATRICK: . . . Hi.

KISSA: . . . I do feel something for you. I want-ed to say this. I feel...you are good. A good person. And I was not good. OK? (He's stony and unresponsive, so she gets up to go.)

PATRICK: Kissa, wait, you don't hafta . . . You can sit here; it's OK. I'm still your friend. Sit down.

KISSA: You are sure?

PATRICK: Sure I'm sure. Sit down, geez. If I was still mad, you'd know it. Sit.

KISSA: (Sits, tentative.) You are very different, Patrick. Even to me.

PATRICK: Everyone's different. So what?

KISSA: You are different, but it is good. You say things from your inside. I telled my mother about you and she sayed, "Amazing." What you sayed to me. Amazing. I like this word.

PATRICK: I like it too—especially how you say it: amazing.

KISSA: Amazing.

PATRICK: Amazing.

KISSA: Amazing. (They laugh, friends again.)

EPILOGUE

ACTOR 1: We are tall, we are short, we are small, we are big, we are brown and white and black.

ACTOR 2: We are all different from each other.

ACTOR 1: A few of us were born big, and privileged.

ACTOR 2: The rest of us have gathered our strength and have had to prove ourselves.

ACTOR 1: A few of you still feel weak or worthless.

ACTOR 2: Some of you know your strength is built on making others afraid.

ACTOR 1: So what you do now makes a difference, because—

ACTOR 2: You can't know how long your cruelty may last in a girl's mind.

ACTOR 1: Or how long your kindness in a boy's.

ACTOR 2: What you do now makes a difference!

ACTOR 1: One that could be amazing, so:

ACTOR 1 and ACTOR 2: (In unison.) Be the difference that equals amazing.

Dear Teachers...

Plan-B Theatre Company (with support from the B.W. Bastian Foundation, Community Foundation of Utah's LGBT Fund and the Utah Division of Arts & Museums) is bringing *Different=Amazing* to your school. An original script by Matthew Ivan Bennett, *Different=Amazing* represents a combination of stories told nationally and across the Wasatch Front, by youth of all ages, about their experiences with the topic of bullying. *Different=Amazing* has truly been a mission of the heart: it emerged from a desire to represent difference as an asset rather than a deficit and to speak to young people and adults who have at times felt marginalized by life.



When you watch the performance of *Different=Amazing* with your students, some powerful take-aways might be:

(GLSEN), over 80% of surveyed students reported hearing homophobic remarks at school. Almost 40% of students

Children are *not* bullies. They sometimes exhibit bullying behaviors, which are unacceptable. But they themselves are not bullies. We must be mindful of the fact that underlying each and every child who engages in bullying behaviors, there is a child who needs our love and support. For further reading and classroom ideas, visit <http://bit.ly/1irXcUy>. See also the section of this document about how to coach students who bully.

Recognize the signs of bullying

- The child frequently loses their belongings
- Complaints of headaches or stomachaches
- Avoiding recess or school activities
- Getting to school very late or very early.

who were the targets of this verbal harassment reported the incident but received no help. We hope this production gives you tools to have mindful conversations about this form of bullying and its intended and unintended consequences. For more information about school climate and resources to address this in your class, visit the GLSEN website at <http://www.glsen.org>.

Bullying based on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity is some of the most prevalent in our schools. In a national school climate survey administered by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network

Children who bully come in all shapes and sizes. Boys bully and so do girls. We often have an image of the "perfect" bully, but there is no such thing. Sometimes, bullying can be very covert, and we must be aware of some of the warning signs (see inset).

DURING THE 2012-13 SCHOOL YEAR, there were 29 reported bullying incidents in Salt Lake City School District and 34 in Davis School District. This seems like an unreasonably low number and is probably more about under-reporting than an accurate reflection of bullying in these two districts. Teaching kids to identify bullying and to speak up is essential. Making sure these incidents get documented and followed up on is even more essential. Kids may be not reporting, especially if they are concerned that there will be no response. Source: USOE Superintendent's Annual Report, 2012-13

Coaching the Student that Bullies

1. Identify the problem and diffuse reporting responsibility ("I have been hearing that...", "Many students have reported that...").
2. Ask questions and gather information ("I'd like to hear from you about...").
3. Apply consequences (e.g., review the school bullying policy).
4. Generate solutions for the future, and create a plan with the child ("What are some ways to prevent this from happening again?").
5. Follow up (i.e., see how the plan is working, contact parents as appropriate, refer students for further discipline, refer more serious/chronic cases to administration or counselor).



Additional resources to share with your class: William's Doll by Charlotte Zolotow, Oliver Button is a Sissy by Tomie de Paola, Bully by Patricia Polacco (this last title addresses the topic of cyber-bullying, currently of significant concern here in Utah—read more in The Salt Lake Tribune (01/09/14): <http://bit.ly/1ktKCJ2>)

Source: Committee for Children Steps to Respect, 2005