



BIAS, BULLYING AND BAD BEHAVIOR IN THE NFL

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to reflect on the recent news story about two Miami Dolphins football players in a situation involving bullying and bias, and which resulted in one player leaving the team and the other player's suspension. The situation has launched a national conversation about bullying, hazing, masculinity, physical and verbal abuse and locker room behavior. ADL has issued a [statement](#) calling on the Dolphins and the NFL to investigate the allegations of bullying.

[NOTE: Please see the [Addendum](#) below for an update on this situation as of February 20, 2014 and optional student activities based on this update]

Grade Level: grades 9–12

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Writing, Language Arts

Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn more about the recent situation between NFL players Richie Incognito and Jonathan Martin.
- Students will analyze the situation and learn about the role bullying and bias played.
- Students will identify their point of view about the situation and support that point of view in writing with evidence and information.

Material: [KWL \(“Know, Want to Know, Learn”\) Chart](#), [“In Bullying Case, Questions on N.F.L. Culture”](#) (*New York Times*, November 14, 2013), [Quotes from People in the Football World](#)

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words. Make sure students know their meanings and define bullying as indicated below.

- Aggressive
- Bullying
- Civility
- Camaraderie
- Hazing
- Humiliation
- Pranks
- Threatening

Bullying: the repeated actions or threats of action directed toward a person by one or more people who have or are perceived to have more power or status than their target in order to cause fear, distress or harm. Bullying can be physical, verbal, psychological or any combination of these three. (See ADL's [Definitions Related to Name-Calling, Bullying and Bias.](#))

INFORMATION SHARING

1. Model this activity as a whole group, recording responses on the *KWL* ("*Know, Want to Know, Learn*") *Chart*, or distribute a copy of the chart to each student and have them complete it as the lesson unfolds.
2. Ask students, *Has anyone heard about the Miami Dolphins players, Richie Incognito and Jonathan Martin, and the recent situation between the two players?* Ask students to share what they know and record responses in the "K" column, which represents what students already know. To discern where they got the information, ask: *How do you know that? Where did you learn that?*
3. Add to what the students shared about the story by summarizing these details:
 - In early November, Jonathan Martin, a left tackle on the Miami Dolphins, left the team after an episode in the cafeteria: a group of players invited Martin to join them at their lunch table in the cafeteria, and then got up and left the moment he sat down. This was the last straw in a string of pranks and perceived slights. Martin complained of an unsafe workplace environment due to harassment by Richie Incognito, a 30 year-old teammate with a reputation for dirty play and a history of rough behavior.
 - Richie Incognito is a left guard on the Miami Dolphins and is on the leadership committee for the team. Incognito was suspended indefinitely by the Dolphins on allegations that he bullied Martin, who accused Incognito of crossing a line of rookie hazing to tormenting him. Martin turned in voicemails and text messages showing Incognito using the N-word to describe Martin and threatening his family. Many of Incognito's teammates have come to his defense. The team and the NFL are investigating the matter.
 - Young players in the NFL are subjected to a wide range of pranks and humiliations, similar to what you hear about in college fraternities. Young players are expected to carry their teammates' equipment off the field; are sometimes forced to sing songs or perform skits at training camps, and are often forced to pick up dinner tabs that can cost thousands of dollars. Players and coaches in the NFL generally condone the culture of pranks, provided they do not become too aggressive.
 - Jonathan Martin and Rich Incognito spent most of the season side by side as part of the offensive line of the Dolphins. They have exchanged more than 1,000 texts. The NFL, its teams and the players' union oppose any form of bullying. Like any employer, teams are responsible for the welfare of their employees and conduct in the workplace, including locker rooms.
 - The NFL has an Excellence in Workplace Conduct program saying "that all N.F.L. players and prospective players have the right to work in a positive environment that is free from any and all forms of harassment, intimidation and discrimination." Players can be disciplined for a host of offenses, including "violent or threatening behavior among employees" and "conduct that undermines or puts at risk the integrity and reputation" of the NFL.
- Elicit additional questions from the students.
4. Ask students: *What are your questions about this situation? What do you want to know more about? What do you think you might learn after reading the New York Times article "[In Bullying Case, Questions on N.F.L. Culture](#)"?* Record responses in the "W" column, representing "Want to Know."
5. Instruct students to fill in what they learned over the course of the activity in the "L" column, representing "Learned."

ANALYZING QUOTES

Have students get into small groups of 4–5 students each. Distribute a different quote from the *Quotes from People in the Football World* to each small group. The quotes represent the different perspectives of various people in the football world. In each group, have students: (1) read the quote out loud, (2) discuss what it means, (3) discuss whose point of view/perspective the quote represents, and (4) share their thoughts and feelings about the point of view.

Give the small groups 10 minutes to do their work and then have each group report back to the whole class, sharing what they discussed.

READING ACTIVITY

Give the students 10–15 minutes to read the following article silently: "[In Bullying Case, Questions on N.F.L. Culture](#)" (*New York Times*, November 14, 2013)

Following their reading, ask these discussion questions:

- What is to blame for the situation? (Locker room culture? Masculinity? Lack of leadership?)
- Based on the definition of bullying above, is this a case of bullying? Why?
- What is the responsibility of the coach in this situation?
- What should be the consequences? Are there long-term solutions to this problem?
- What do we still not know that we need to know?

WRITING ACTIVITY

Either during class time or for homework, have students write an opinion article or a "Letter to the Editor" in which they express their points of view about the situation. Tell students they must use information, evidence and quotes from the article (or other research they do) to support their point of view.

CLOSING

Say to students: *Look at the list of KWL items under "Want to Know" in order to determine whether the questions you asked initially have been answered during the course of the lesson. Also, ask: Was there anything else you learned that you found interesting?* Add responses to the "L" section of the chart, "Learned."

ADDENDUM TO THIS LESSON

as of February 20, 2014

During the 2013 football season, the Miami Dolphins requested that the NFL investigate the allegations of misconduct. The NFL then commissioned an independent report which was issued in February 2014. The report concluded that the three starters on the Dolphins offensive line, Richie Incognito, John Jerry and Mike Pouncey, engaged in a pattern of harassment directed at not only Jonathan Martin, but also another young Dolphins offensive lineman. The 144-page report, [Report to the National Football League Concerning Issues of Workplace Conduct at the Miami Dolphins](#) is available for reading. As a follow-up to the lesson, teachers can have their students read sections of the full report or a summary of the report in the *New York*

Times February 14, 2014 article "[‘A Classic Case of Bullying’ on the Dolphins, Report Finds](#)" to discuss its findings.]

ADDITIONAL READING

- [Dolphins Fail the Test on Bullying, and Now It's Up to the Commissioner](#) (*NY Times*, November 15, 2013)
- [Football Hazing and Other NFL Failures: Our View](#) (*USA Today*, November 18, 2013)
- [The NFL's Bully Boys](#) (*Los Angeles Times* Op Ed, November 12, 2013)
- [Richie Incognito Tackles Jonathan Martin Controversy: 'My Actions Were Coming From a Place of Love'](#) (ABC News, November 10, 2013)
- [Traditions, Not Coaches, Rule in NFL Locker Rooms](#) (*NY Times*, November 5, 2013)
- [Richie Incognito-Jonathan Martin Controversy: A Lot of Furor Despite a Lot of Uncertainty](#) (*Washington Post*, November 11, 2013)
- [Was Brainy Brawny Miami Dolphin Bullied?](#) (Bloomberg.com, November 4, 2013)

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

[R.1](#) Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

[R.2](#) Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

[R.6](#) Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

[W.1](#) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

[L.1](#) Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

[L.4](#) Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

KWL (KNOW, WANT TO KNOW, LEARNED) CHART

Know	Want to Know	Learned

QUOTES FROM PEOPLE IN THE FOOTBALL WORLD

Quote #1: Richie Incognito

"My actions were coming from a place of love. No matter how bad or how vulgar it sounds, that's how we communicate, that's how our friendship was. Those are the facts and that's what I'm accountable for."

"This isn't an issue about bullying. This is an issue of my and Jon's relationship where I have taken stuff too far. I did not intend to hurt him. When the words are put in the context, I understand why a lot of eyebrows get raised. But people don't know how Jon and I communicate to one another."

Quote #2: Trevor Pryce, defensive end who played for 14 years

"Coaches could care less about what happens in the locker room because they have a job to do and we have a job to do. We play for the highest bidder. Allegiances are very temporary. To some extent, the inmates run the asylum. The coaches have a lot of other things to deal with."

Quote #3: Joe Philbin, coach of the Miami Dolphins

"I want you to know as the head coach of the Miami Dolphins, I'm in charge of the workplace atmosphere. If the review shows that this is not a safe atmosphere, I will take whatever measures necessary to make sure that it is."

Quote #4: Willie Colon, Jets guard

"Any time a guy feels disrespected and like he can't go to work and feel comfortable, that's when you can't have that in the locker room. Because at the end of the day, he's playing, he's playing for you, so you've got to take care of each other."

Quote #5: Austin Howard, Jets offensive tackle

"Everybody's done it [the pranks]. It's all in good fun. And then the next year, they're going to do it to the guy who's there the next year. It builds camaraderie. It's never intended to be hurtful or disrespectful."

Quote #6: David Cornwell, Jonathan Martin's attorney

"Jonathan Martin's toughness is not at issue. Jonathan has started every game with the Miami Dolphins since he was drafted in 2012. The issue is Jonathan's treatment by his teammates. Jonathan endured harassment that went far beyond the traditional locker room hazing.... beyond the well-publicized voicemail with its racial epithet, Jonathan endured a malicious physical attack on him by a teammate, and daily vulgar comments. These facts are not in dispute."