

Themes in Focus

Answers will vary. These are suggested answers to questions on page 8.

COURAGE AND EMPATHY

1. What did Jamie and his lawyers hope to accomplish by filing a lawsuit?

They hoped to draw attention to the life-threatening harassment and violence that Jamie experienced in middle school and high school at the hands of bullies who targeted him for being gay. Through their precedent-setting lawsuit, Jamie and his lawyers sought to hold school administrators accountable for providing a safe learning environment for all students.

2. What do you think Jamie felt on a typical day?

Jamie experienced feelings of fear, self-loathing, helplessness, stress and depression, as well as the pain of physical violence that was inflicted upon him. He dreaded going to school and often felt the need to hide from classmates, to arrive at school early and stay late, and to avoid using the school bathroom for fear of being assaulted there.

THE IMPACT OF BULLYING: DEALING WITH DISCRIMINATION

1. What role did bystanders play in Jamie's bullying?

Many students remained passive onlookers who did nothing to stop the bullying despite witnessing violence against Jamie. One teacher offered Jamie safe refuge in her classroom and attempted to persuade administrators to intervene. Some students urged on the bullies.

2. What are some common misconceptions about bullying?

One serious misconception is that bullying is an inevitable part of the school environment—that “boys will be boys” and therefore bullying cannot be prevented. Another misconception is that the consequences of bullying are not severe; the reality is that bullying has driven students to take their own lives and has caused lifelong physical and psychological scars. Some people mistakenly believe that bullying harms only the victim; in fact, the bully, passive bystanders and those close to the bully and victim may all be affected for life. Yet another misconception is that some students bring bullying upon themselves through their actions and thus “deserve” to be bullied.

MAKING HISTORY: STANDING UP FOR JUSTICE

1. What is the constitutional basis of Jamie's case?

Jamie's lawyers argued that every student deserves equal protection under the law. This is a reference to the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which says that “no state shall ... deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” Jamie's lawyers argued that the school didn't apply its anti-bullying policies equally, and treated Jamie differently because of his sexual orientation.

2. What are Jamie's key messages when he speaks at the assembly? What lessons do you take away from his story?

Jamie argues that all students deserve to be safe when they are at school. He also urges students to stand up and speak out if they are being harassed or bullied or if they see an unjust situation. Jamie reminds students that individuals have the power to make a difference and points to his own case as a powerful example of this idea.