

EXPLORE-FIRST LESSON

The Fourth Person in the Room

What a bystander is actually deciding — and the four things they can do instead

Teacher	Middle School Teacher	School	Sample Middle School
Subject	Social-Emotional Learning	Grade	7
Class / Period	Advisory	Date	
Block length	45 minutes	Framework	Danielson Framework for Teaching

Phase times are targets, not stopwatches.

Framework: Danielson Framework for Teaching, 2013 component language. If your district uses the 2022 edition the component names differ — 1e is Planning Coherent Instruction and 1f is Designing and Analyzing Assessments.

Standards & Objectives

CASEL Framework · Social Awareness and Responsible Decision-Making

1c Setting Instructional Outcomes

Competency	Student-facing "I Can"	Language objective
CASEL — Responsible Decision-Making Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions — including the consequences of doing nothing.	I can name four things a bystander can actually do, and pick the one that fits.	Students will use bystander, upstander, direct, distract, delegate and delay in speech and writing. Frames: "I would ___ because ___." · "That option costs ___."
CASEL — Social Awareness Recognizing situational demands and opportunities — reading what a moment actually requires.	I can tell the difference between a joke and something that is not a joke to the person it is about.	Frame: "It looked like ___, but for that person it was ___."

Who Does This Work — and Who Got the Credit

1b Demonstrating Knowledge of Students

Where the research came from, and what got left out. Psychologists studied why people who witness something do nothing, and the finding — that people are less likely to act when others are present — became widely known. The research was prompted by a 1964 murder in New York that was reported at the time as having thirty-eight witnesses who did nothing. Later investigation showed the reporting was substantially wrong: some people did call for help, and at least one neighbor went to her. The finding about groups is real. The story attached to it was not accurate, and the correction never traveled as far as the original.

Why that matters for this lesson. The story was told for decades as proof that people are cold. What the better evidence shows is narrower and more useful: people freeze when they are unsure whether it is their place to act, and when nobody else has moved. That is a solvable problem. Coldness is not.

Who does this work now. School counselors, restorative practice coordinators and deans handle these situations daily. Trust and safety analysts at technology companies decide what happens to a post that reports harm — a growing field. Community organizers, conflict mediators, human resources specialists, crisis line workers, police and emergency dispatchers.

How people enter that work: dispatch, crisis line work and mediation are commonly entered through a certificate or on-the-job training. Trust and safety analysis often takes a four-year degree but not always. Counseling generally requires a master's. Requirements vary by state.

Ask the class: "The correction to that story never traveled as far as the original. Why do you think the wrong version was the one that stuck?"

The Problem

3c Engaging Students in Learning

Four situations, all fictional, all in a group chat or a hallway. In each one somebody is being made small. In each one there are people watching who are not doing it and not stopping it. Students are given no advice about what to do.

Driving question students are working to answer:

You are not the one doing it. You are also not stopping it. What are you actually choosing — and what could you do that you would really do?

Key Questions

3b Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques

Question, exactly as I ask it	Level	Where	Strong answer sounds like
"Nobody in these scenarios is a villain. So why does nobody stop it?"	DOK 2	Launch	Names social cost, uncertainty, or nobody else moving — not that people are bad.
"You said you would say something. Say it. Out loud, right now, the actual words."	DOK 3	Explore — to a stuck group	Produces something sayable, and usually discovers their first version was not.
"Two groups chose different options for the same scenario. What is each of you protecting?"	DOK 3	Synthesize	Names the trade-off — the target person, their own standing, or the friendship.
"What is the cost of doing nothing? Not to you — to the person it is about."	DOK 3	Assess	Separates their own risk from the impact on the target.

Accountable-talk stems, posted at each table: "I would ____ because ____." · "That would cost ____." · "Would you actually do that?"

Wait time: seven seconds. Seventh graders fill silence with jokes — hold it anyway.

Materials & Prep

1d Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources

Prepare before the bell	Copies / quantity
Scenario cards — four per group (Appendix A). All fictional.	7 sets
Four Options sheet (Appendix B)	28
Board pre-divided: Direct · Distract · Delegate · Delay — written but NOT explained	before the bell
Chart paper and markers	7 sheets
Your school's actual reporting routes, printed — who, where, and whether it can be anonymous	28

BEFORE YOU TEACH THIS: Every scenario is fictional and none should resemble anything that happened in this school. Students will still recognize themselves — as the target, as the bystander, and sometimes as the one doing it. Say at the start that nobody names a real person and nobody is being accused. Watch for the student who goes very quiet and check on them afterward, not during. If anything disclosed suggests harassment, threat, or harm to a student, you follow your district's mandated reporting procedure the same day. Know your procedure before you open this lesson.

Grouping Plan

1b Demonstrating Knowledge of Students

Seven mixed groups of four, assigned by you, not chosen. Friendship groups will perform agreement and say nothing true. Mixed groups disagree, and the disagreement is the entire lesson.

How the support lanes work: three versions of the Four Options sheet sit at every table — one with an example filled in for the first scenario, the core version, and an extension on the back.

Access principles:

- Students still building English proficiency face a real added difficulty here — intervening in a second language, fast, in front of peers. Name that as legitimate and let them script in writing before speaking.
- Students with writing goals may present orally. The competency is the decision and the words, not the handwriting.
- Any student may pass during the rehearsal without giving a reason. Say so before you begin, not when someone freezes.

Anticipated Student Responses

Ordered deliberately.

1a Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy

What students will say	Why they will say it	When I call on it
"It's not my business." (productive wrong turn)	Honest, common, and how most people actually behave. It is also the thing the whole lesson exists to examine.	FIRST. Do not shame it. Ask what it costs the person it is about.
"Just tell them to stop."	The answer students think adults want, offered without meaning it.	SECOND. Ask them to say it out loud. Watch it collapse. That collapse is the most useful moment in the lesson.
"Tell a teacher."	The safe answer, and often the right one — but said as a way to end the conversation.	THIRD. Take it seriously and get specific. Which teacher? When? Can it be anonymous? Most will not know.
"I'd just text them after."	Students who have done this, and it is genuinely valuable.	FOURTH. Name it as real. Checking on the target afterward changes their experience even when nobody intervened.
"Change the subject so it stops without a fight."	Socially sophisticated students who have actually done it.	FIFTH. The target. Now name all four options on the board.
"What if I make it worse?"	The real fear underneath the whole conversation.	LAST. Answer honestly. Sometimes you can. That is why there are four options and not one.

Adults in the Room

1e Designing Coherent Instruction

I am the only adult in this room, and that matters here. A student may disclose something real. I stay mobile enough to step aside with one student for two minutes without the room noticing.

Phase	My circulation plan
1 Launch	Front of room. Set the frame before the cards go out.
2 Explore	Fixed route, Groups 1→7, ninety seconds each. Withhold the four options entirely. Log which group reached which. Note anyone who has gone quiet — do not approach during the phase.
3 Synthesize	Front of room, calling groups in order. I write only what a student has said.
4 Apply	Circulating during rehearsal. Some students need me standing near them to say it aloud at all.
5 Assess	Near the door. Anyone who wants to hang back should be able to without it being visible.

PHASE 1 — LAUNCH (about 5 minutes)

Set the frame. Give no options.

3c Engaging Students in Learning

Time	Teacher steps & script	Student action
0:00–5:00	1. Frame first. Say: "Everything on these cards is made up. Nobody in this room is being described and nobody is being accused. And if you want to talk to me about something real afterward, stay behind or message me and I will make time today." 2. Distribute the scenario cards face down. Say nothing about the board. 3. Say: "Four situations. In every one, somebody is being made small. And in every one there are people watching who are not doing it and not stopping it." 4. Ask: "Nobody here is a villain. So why does nobody stop it?" Take two answers. Write both. Confirm neither.	• Listen to the frame • Turn cards over and read • Two students answer aloud • Begin at the table

Time	Teacher steps & script	Student action
	5. Say: "Eighteen minutes. For each card your group decides what a person watching could actually do — and the exact words. Not what you should say. What you would say. Go."	

PHASE 2 — EXPLORE (about 18 minutes) Level: DOK 3 • Strategic Thinking

Students generate the options before I name them. Questions only.

3b Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques

Time	Teacher steps & script	What I am listening for
5:00–23:00	1. Fixed route, ninety seconds per group, repeating. 2. To a group saying not my business: "What does it cost the person it is about? Not you. Them." 3. To a group saying tell them to stop: "Say it. Out loud, right now, the actual words." Then: "Would you say that in front of everybody?" 4. To a group saying tell a teacher: "Which teacher? When? Could you do it without anyone knowing it was you?" 5. To a group with one idea only: "That option is off the table. Now what?" 6. To a group that has several: "Rank them by what it costs you. Does the cheapest one still help?" 7. To a group asking what they should do: "I am not going to tell you. What would you actually do at lunch today?" 8. At 20:00: "Three minutes. Every card needs an action and real words." 9. Log which group reached which options. No four-option framework from me in this phase.	• Which groups reach confronting, distracting, reporting, or checking in afterward — I need all four • Any group that names changing the subject as a strategy. That is the hinge — it is the one students underestimate. • Scripts that are sayable versus scripts that sound like a poster • Students distinguishing the cost to themselves from the cost to the target • Anyone who has gone quiet. Note it. Check afterward, not now.

PHASE 3 — SYNTHESIZE (about 11 minutes)

Name the four options from their work.

3a Communicating with Students

Time	Teacher steps & script	Check for understanding
23:00–34:00	1. Say: "Different groups landed differently. We are going in order." 2. Call the not my business group. Say: "That is the most honest answer anybody gave today and it is what most adults do. And it has a cost, and the cost is paid by somebody else." 3. Call the tell them to stop group. Ask them to say it aloud again. Then: "Notice how hard that was in a room where nobody is actually watching." Write DIRECT on the board. 4. Call the tell a teacher group. Get specific with them in front of everyone. Write DELEGATE. Hold up your school's actual reporting routes. 5. Call the text them after group. Say: "This one gets dismissed and it should not. The target remembers who checked on them for years." Write DELAY. 6. Call the change the subject group last. Say: "This is the one nobody teaches and the one that works most often, because it costs almost nothing and nobody has to lose face." Write DISTRACT. 7. Say: "Four options. You generated all four before I wrote a word. The question is never whether to do something — it is which of the four fits this moment and this you."	• Whiteboard hold-up: name the option that costs you least. Scanning for distract or delay • Cold call, no hands up: "Why is delay not the same as doing nothing?" • Whether students learning English are using the four terms in their scripts

PHASE 4 — APPLY (about 6 minutes) Level: DOK 3

Saying it out loud, which is the actual skill.

3c Engaging Students in Learning

Time	Teacher steps & script	Differentiated accommodations
34:00–40:00	1. Distribute Appendix B. 2. Say: “Pick the scenario that felt most real to you. Pick one of the four options. Write the words. Then say them to your partner.” 3. Say: “Rules: it has to be something you would actually say, in your own voice, in front of people. If it sounds like a poster, rewrite it.” 4. Circulate. Stand near anyone who cannot begin. Say: “Just the first four words. I will say them with you.” 5. At 39:00: “Write down the version you would use.”	Scaffolded Access 1. Sheet with one option modeled and an opening phrase supplied. 2. Student may write and read rather than improvise, or rehearse with me instead of a peer. Core Task Student selects an option, scripts it in their own voice, and says it aloud. Extension / 2e Strength-Forward 1. Run it again where the person doubles down, and hold your position without escalating. 2. Write what you would say to the target afterward, privately. <i>Any student may pass on speaking without giving a reason.</i>

PHASE 5 — ASSESS (about 5 minutes)

1f Designing Student Assessments

Time	Assessment task	Success criteria
40:00–45:00	1. Say: “On your own. Four sentences.” 2. Display: “Pick a scenario. Name which of the four you would use and why that one. Write the words. Then answer: what is the cost of doing nothing — to the person it is about?” 3. Circulate; collect. 4. Say as they pack: “If any of that was closer to home than made-up, come find me. Today, not next week.” 5. Stand near the door so one student can hang back without it being obvious.	Full credit: names an option with a reason tied to the situation, writes words in their own voice, and names a cost borne by the target rather than by themselves. Partial: names an option and words, but the cost given is only their own risk. Reteach: answers that nothing can be done. This is a one-to-one conversation this week, not a whole-class reteach.

Phase 6 — Post-Lesson Reflection

4a Reflecting on Teaching

What worked well?

What would I change?

Student evidence of mastery:

Who went quiet, and who did I follow up with:

Anything that needs to go to a counselor or an administrator:

Appendix A — Scenario Cards

Print one set per group. Cut apart. All fictional.

#	The situation
1	In a group chat, somebody posts a photo of a classmate with a caption making fun of what they are wearing. Six people react with laughing faces. The classmate is in the chat.
2	At lunch, a group repeats a nickname somebody hates. They say it is just a joke. The person laughs along and then stops eating.
3	A student answers a question in class using a word incorrectly. Two students imitate their accent afterward in the hallway. Others laugh.
4	Someone you are friendly with keeps being left out of plans. Nobody says anything cruel. They are simply never included, and everybody notices.

Appendix B — Four Options

Print one per student.

Option	What it means	What I would actually say or do
DIRECT	Say something to the person doing it, in the moment	
DISTRACT	Change what is happening so it stops, without a confrontation	
DELEGATE	Get somebody else — an adult, or a person with more standing	
DELAY	Check on the person afterward, privately	

The one I would actually use, and why:

What doing nothing costs the person it is about:

Who I can report something to at this school, and whether it can be anonymous: