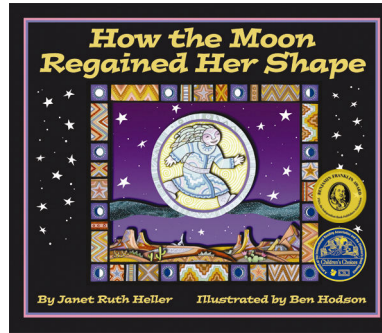


A Conversation with Janet Heller *author of How the Moon Regained Her Shape*



Why did you write *How the Moon Regained Her Shape*?

I based *How the Moon Regained Her Shape* on bullying that I experienced when I was a child. I was a new student at an elementary school. One girl taunted me every day during recess: “You’re so skinny I can see right through you.” I was shy and did not know what to do about my problem. I wrote my book to help other bullied kids. As I grew up, I learned that my friends and adults could help me with problems like bullying. *How the Moon Regained Her Shape* honors people who assisted me when I had difficult situations.

What are the most frequently asked questions you encounter as an author?

People ask me how to publish stories, essays, and poems; how to prevent bullying in schools and other organizations; how to raise children who have good self-confidence and will not bully others; why I use Native American characters in *How the Moon Regained Her Shape*.

What sparks your creativity?

I like to attend plays, poetry readings, and presentations by fiction writers. These get my mind working and give me ideas to develop in my own way. I read books, folktales, and short works by other writers. I also like music very much. Playing music or going to a concert moves my mind into creative gear. I’m also in a writers’ group that meets monthly. The four other people in this group give me helpful comments on my work and a lot of support.

What tips do you have for parents regarding bullying?

While children need to learn to cope with constructive criticism, occasional tactless remarks, and accidental touching, they often need adult help with frequent harassment. Kids rarely have the social or physical skills to deal with persistent bullies. Here is some advice for families whose kids get bullied:

Make sure that communication lines are open. Listen carefully to children when they complain about being taunted, threatened, pushed, or hit by other kids. Bullying is dangerous to kids’ mental, emotional, and physical health.

Teach your children not to bully others. Point out that everyone’s body and clothing is different and that we all have different strengths and weaknesses. We can also disagree with one another without resorting to name-calling or fights.

Talk with children about different options for countering verbal or physical attacks without being mean or violent. They can ask the bully to leave them alone and tell him or her that they are not interested in such comments, threats, etc. They can tell a nearby adult, such as a neighbor, a parent, a grandparent, a teacher, a school psychologist, a coach, a Scout leader, or a principal. They can ask their friends for advice.

Point out to children that when someone insults them with cruel words, these words do not make the insult true. Remind kids that they have friends and family members who like them, care about them, and see them as good and nice people.

Teach children that no matter how big, strong, or popular someone is, he or she does not have the right to hurt our bodies or our feelings.

Help children understand that other kids may need them to stand up against a bully or group of bullies. It is not tattling to tell an adult that a bully or a gang is planning to attack someone. If one adult will not listen, children need to keep telling adults until someone assists them.

Urge children to tell you or other adults if they see kids carrying weapons, especially if the other children threaten to use these weapons.

If bullying occurs at school, talk with teachers or with the principal. Encourage them to hold class workshops on bullying with trained social workers or psychologists. Also, suggest that the school, club, or organization establish a no-tolerance policy for bullying. Many schools also have a "Bully Box" to allow students to report harassment without signing their names.

Consider giving your children basic training in self-defense. There are many classes for young people in karate, judo, and other martial arts. Such training can give children self-confidence and teach them how to block blows and frustrate attackers.

Dispel myths about bullies. Bullies can be any size, any sex, any age, and any skin color. We need to help children understand that bullying is not cool and that they have a right to counter bullies in any constructive way.

Want to continue this conversation? Schedule an interview!

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