

# BULLY FOR YOU by JOHN TARRANT

## CAST

SANDRA aged 12

TIM or TINA [could be a boy or a girl's part.] - chat show host

CECIL BAKER no reason why this should not be Cecily Baker, if desired. - a politician

THE STUDIO AUDIENCE who play the rest of the parts  
which are, in order of appearance:

ANNOUNCER

CUECARD HOLDER

DEREK - Sandra's brother , aged 13 - could be Erica, Sandra's sister

LOUISE

NICOLA

SUZANNE

TEACHER 1

TEACHER 2

PUPIL 1

PUPIL 2

PUPIL 3

LADY 1

MAN 1

MAN 2

SANDRA'S MUM

LADY 2

VOICE 1

VOICE 2

VOICE 3

VOICE 4

VOICE 5

VOICE 6

VOICE 7

VOICE 8

VOICE 9

VOICE 10

VOICE 11

YOUNG LADY

Though something is lost by Derek becoming Erica, this is still a play that is viable for an all female cast. Man 1 is a little macho for your usual woman - but why not? Man 2 could easily be a woman.

Could be played by as few as 10 people [dividing up the Voice parts further] or as many as you like up to about 18.

The running time is about forty-five minutes to one hour.

## EXTRACT ONE

*Lights change, putting into shadow Tim and the studio audience. A single spotlight is on central stage area. Derek, Sandra's brother runs into the spot.*

DEREK

It were the day of the school summer treat. All of Years 7 and 8 were going on coaches to Margate. We'd been looking forward to it for weeks. Some of us had never even seen the

sea - not the real thing, which goes on and on, far as you can look. And there's the fair there, too - rides, slot machines, the lot! Wicked! Don't you think so, Sandra?

*A spot comes on towards the side of the stage, on Sandra.*

SANDRA *shrugs*

'S'alright, I s'pose.

DEREK

That's typical of my sister. Sandra has a habit of putting a dampener on things. [*To her*] Aren't you looking forward to it, then?

SANDRA

Not really.

DEREK

Why ever not? It'll be a break from school, anyway. [*To audience.*] Then she said a strange thing.

SANDRA

School's bad enough - but at least it's safer than that.

DEREK

What?

SANDRA

No teachers watching. Just my class ... the girls in my class.

DEREK *to audience*

I ask you ... what's she like? Talk about screwy. Don't know what she's complaining about. Some of those girls in her class - well, they're just girls of course - but they're really nice ... a real laugh.

*The lights brighten over the whole central area of the stage. A group of kids come on, jostling, queueing in a haphazard fashion - waiting for the coaches. Sandra stands alone. Derek joins a group of his friends, laughing and pushing. One group of girls start eyeing Sandra, whispering and giggling. Finally, Louise pushes Nicola forward.*

LOUISE

Your turn, Nicola. I did her yesterday.

NICOLA *approaching Sandra*

All right then Sandra? [*Sandra turns away.*] That your packed lunch? What you got then? [*Sandra grips it tightly.*] Well that's not very nice, is it? Don't you want to share? [*over her shoulder*] She don't want to share, girls. Reckon she wants to keep herself to herself. Well, that's all right then, 'cos we ain't sharing with her either, are we? [*The others giggle.*]

*Two teachers come in. Teacher 1 catches the tail-end of this last speech and asks ...*

TEACHER 1

All right, Sandra?

*Sandra shrugs and mumbles.*

TEACHER 2

Speak up, Sandra. You won't get anywhere in life unless you make yourself heard.

TEACHER 1

Right, quiet please. I said 'Quiet!' Sort yourselves out quickly. Good. Now before we all get onto the coach, I'm just going to lay down a few ground rules about today's trip. We want you to have fun but at the same time we don't want any accidents. O.K.? Now everyone got their spending money?

TEACHER 2

And your packed lunch?

TEACHER 1

I don't want any eating on the coach and don't drop any litter on the beach or in the funfair. You wouldn't like it if someone dropped litter on you, would you? Before you get onto the coach get yourselves into groups of three or four. You must stay in these groups all day - no

separating for any reason.

TEACHER 2

One wants to go to the loo, you all go together. Got it?

TEACHER 1

So stick together and meet as arranged at the funfair entrance at two o'clock, to get the coaches back to school. Are there any last questions?

NICOLA

When are we coming back, Miss?

TEACHER 1

Nicola, you haven't been listening to a word I've said. Have you? We leave at two o'clock on the dot. If you weren't so busy chattering with Suzanne you'd be able to follow what's going on.

Right, get into your groups if you haven't already done so and line up.

*Pupils move into groups.*

TEACHER 1

O.K. quieten down. Now, Sandra doesn't seem to be in a group. Who will take Sandra into their group? Come on you lot.

LOUISE *putting her hand up*

We'll have her, Miss.

SANDRA

No. I don't want to.

TEACHER 1 *over-riding*

That's very kind of you, Louise. Don't be silly, Sandra. Everyone has to be in a group - you know that.

Now, listen up. Remember what I said about waiting on the coach and when we get there, you stay in your groups. Look after each other, all right? Any problems, members of staff are taking it in turns to be at the funfair entrance all through the day.

TEACHER 2

So you'll know where to find us. All right? Go on, Sandra, don't hang back. Stick with your group....

## EXTRACT TWO

*Sandra comes in and stands beside Tim on a wave of clapping and cheering, stimulated by the cuecard.*

TIM

Well, Sandra. What's it like to be a real victim of bullying?

SANDRA *finding it difficult to speak*

What would you like to know?

TIM

Perhaps you could tell us how it feels to be bullied.

SANDRA *with some spirit*

How do you think it feels?

*The lights change and the studio audience become pupils in a classroom. General chaos. Sandra walks into the classroom with her bag. The noise stops and a whisper begins - and then turns into the 'Woof Woof Woof' we are beginning to associate with the bullying of Sandra. Out of this grows a chant - mocking - 'Sandy, Sandy, Sandy!' accompanying the seizing and chucking about of Sandra's bag from one to the other. Sandra stands hunched in the centre. Finally, one of the pupils empties her bag on the floor at her feet.*

LOUISE

Come on, Sandy, good dog. Down on all fours now. Down.. I tell you, Sandy, my labrador is much more obedient than you. She always sits down on the floor when I tell her. She'll do anything I say. Woof, Sandy. Go on, woof, like a good dog.

OTHER PUPILS  
Woof, Sandy, woof.

*They freeze behind Sandra as she steps slowly towards the audience. Lights go down to a single spot on Sandra.*

SANDRA  
How do you think it feels? To be barked at the whole time - I know - when you say it, it just seems so silly. But it isn't, not to me. And the boys have started calling me a 'dog' too. 'Oy Sandy, you're too much of a dog for anyone to want you. No one likes ugly dogs. ... Yuk!' ... and so on. I wish I'd never been born. I wish I could be in a place where I didn't have to see anyone ever again. I hate people. Especially the people at this school.

*After a brief pause, the lights come back up to bright. The pupils are back as studio audience.*

TIM  
A sad tale. Tell me, Sandra, why do they bark and call you Sandy? I have a niece called Sandy - *[mugs and waves out front]* hi there, darling, if you're watching - and it's a lovely name. Short for Alexandra in our case - still, you can't have everything!

SANDRA  
Louise's dog is called Sandy.

TIM  
You're going to have to speak up a little Sandra so everyone here and at home can hear you. *[to audience]* Sandra has just said that Louise has got a dog called Sandy. *[back to Sandra]* So here you are, Sandra, to tell us all about it. And that's very brave of you, isn't it folks? Let's have a round of applause for Sandra's courage. *[Claps and cheers.]* Now, Sandra - you can hear we're all behind you. Tell us how this bullying makes you feel.

SANDRA *very soft*  
It feels terrible.

TIM  
Speak up, darling. They can't hear you.

SANDRA *still soft*  
It feels terrible.

TIM *giving up on her*  
She says it makes her feel terrible, folks. Just terrible. And there's no doubting that Sandra means just that. What she's going through is a living nightmare. We are witnessing Sandra's pain but are there answers to it? Let's take the spotlight off Sandra for a moment - you can go and sit down, darling, over there - and turn to our studio audience. I'd like to ask you this question: How should someone like Sandra cope with being bullied? ... Yes, Madam.

LADY 1 *an elderly woman*

Well, Tim, my mother always used to sit me down, look me in the eyes and say, 'Sticks and stones may break my bones but names can never hurt me.' And you know, Tim, she used to make me say that twenty times each night before I went to sleep.

TIM  
And were you the victim of bullying?

LADY 1  
Well yes, Tim, I was. And I'll tell you this, Tim - my mother used to tell me to walk away from it. 'Walk away, Elizabeth,' she'd say to me. 'Walk away; turn your back on them; they're not worth the bother, they're not, Elizabeth.' And then Tim, she'd look me in the eyes and do you know what she'd say?

TIM  
Well ...

LADY 1  
She'd say, Tim, about them sticks and stones and how as they were only names those bullies were calling me. Do you know what she'd do then?

TIM  
Yes, well, I'm sure we're all dying to know but we really must move on and let others have a chance to speak. After all, this is a show for everyone! *[Laughter in response to cue card.]* Sir, what advice would you give Sandra. And try to keep it short! *[He gestures to Lady 1.]*

*Audience laughter.]*

MAN 1

Now Tim, I've been thinking about this bullying thing and you know what? I think we've got to look closely at these victims. You know, it's all very well to feel sorry for these people and I'm sure this er ... um ...

TIM

Sandra.

MAN 1

Yes, Sandra - well, I'm sure Sandra hasn't brought this bullying onto herself, but you know, I think the best thing we can do for these victims is to teach them to stand up for themselves. All this 'turn the other cheek' business and 'turn your back and walk away!' Well, Tim, it's a tough old world out there and we can't always turn our backs, can we? Sometimes we've just got to stand up for ourselves - we've got to let other people know we're not going to be pushed around. [*Cheers and clapping.*] Now I'm not saying we should get violent - well, not unless it's absolutely necessary. It's in the Bible, ain't it? 'An eye for an eye' it says ...

TIM

Yes, well - thankyou sir. I think we've caught your drift. So it's a course in self defence or karate for Sandra, is it? [*Laughter*] Yes, sir.

MAN 2

I just want to say that I was bullied at school and I've never got over it. It's ruined my life.

TIM

Oh dear. Looking back, can you think of anything you could have done? Anything that might help Sandra now?

MAN 2

Talk to someone if you can. I didn't have anyone. Move classes if possible - or schools if it's too bad...

### EXTRACT THREE

*Lights change and the studio audience range themselves around the stage to become the voice of Sandra's diary. Some of the action suggested by the text is shown in slow motion.*

SANDRA

Dear Diary ... Today was very bad. They didn't stop all day. They started on the way to school, barking and calling ...

VOICE 1

'Sandy, good dog! Sandy!'

SANDRA

I tried to walk in amongst another group as I got to the school gates, but they were there, as they always are. I walked more quickly, head down.

VOICE 2

I keep my head down. I don't look up. I don't hear the names. I am learning to go blind and deaf. I am trying not to notice.

VOICE 3

I am building a wall around me. It is hard. When it's complete, maybe they won't hurt me any more.

VOICE 4

I keep my head down, I don't look up. But they stand in my way. They lift my chin up. They make me see them.

VOICE 5

I could feel the eyes of all the others standing behind me, staring, staring. I feel small. It's the worst feeling in the world.

VOICE 6

I try to move to the right to get around them, but they move to block my way.

VOICE 7

One of them pulls my hair then another holds my chin up so that I am forced to look at 'her.'

VOICE 8

'Look at me when I'm talking to you,' she says. Then she spits in my face.

VOICE 9

They all run off laughing. I wipe the spit from my face and go into my first lesson.

SANDRA

Why do they hate me so?

VOICE 9

Diary, you know I don't write any names but you know who I mean when I say 'she.' Well, 'she' asked Miss if I could sit next to her in History. Miss thought she was being 'so' kind.

VOICE 10

'That's a lovely idea! Sandra sits on her own so often. It will be nice for her to have someone to sit next to.'

SANDRA

Are all teachers stupid or what? Couldn't she see the rest of the class laughing? Couldn't she hear the growls - that one who yapped like a little dog? Didn't she understand that they were laughing at me?

VOICE 11

'She' sat next to me all lesson. It was terrible. She kept looking back at her friends and laughing. It was so funny for them - so awful for me.

SANDRA

I don't think I can live with this for much longer...

EXTRACT from Production Notes

## **PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.**

### **INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTION.**

The obvious intention of the play is to focus on the theme of bullying but there is a secondary intention which is to underline the falseness of the supposed issue-based chat show and of politicians.

The chatshow purports to deal with a serious issue in a serious manner, but fails to treat Sandra sensitively - or indeed anyone with anything 'real' and painful to say. Instead it skulks around the edges of the topic, aiming for good viewing for the unseen T.V. audience and sacrificing any real results from its forum in favour of entertainment.

The political figure of Cecil - or Cecily - Baker spouts the usual bland nothings which sound good sense until you examine them and see that they are empty of any real design to improve things in schools.

The play does not offer any real answers, but is useful as a vehicle for discussion [should this be desired - it would make a good play for a class to read for English, for instance.] Through the mouths of the studio audience, a variety of differing solutions to the problem of bullying are aired whilst running like a seam throughout, the 'real' story of Sandra is used as a contrast to the atmosphere of the studio.

### **CHARACTERS**

SANDRA aged 12 is the focus of the whole play. She is in Year 7 and it is the summer term. Though described by her mother as having been a happy child until she went to secondary school, the Sandra we see is awkward and diffident. Her problems have caused her to go inside herself, so that she finds it impossible to speak to her family or teachers about her problem, mainly because she is afraid of not being taken seriously, of not being believed, of being told to snap out of it. She is crying out for sympathy and understanding, but everyone is too busy to notice. Sympathy for her is not raised by the scenes in which she is interacting with others; there we perceive only her awkwardness. But in the scenes where, through the Voices of her diary, for instance, she can reveal her true feelings, strong feelings are evoked. The playing style should vary from hunched, head down, muttered or babyishly defiant [with her family], slouching walk, shuffling feet, unattractive expression - to quietly desperate, intelligent and thoughtful, as she comes over in her spoken thoughts. These are done through the medium of direct address to the audience and need to be spoken clearly and sincerely

with appropriately open body language.

TIM or TINA - the chat show host is an unlikeable character. Plenty of 'oomph' needed in the playing style, which can be modelled on Jerry Springer, perhaps, or on the mannerisms of Davina McCall. We have all seen chat shows of one kind or another and an actor should find it easy to develop a style in accordance. Insincerity should shine out from everything he says. He is patronising with the members of the studio audience and with Sandra. Should we have any doubts about him, they are dispersed on the line 'What are you trying to do? Ruin my show?' At times, we do see him thrown by the passion evinced by certain members of the audience and this needs to be emphasised. He cannot cope with real emotion and we should see the relief on his face when he announces next week's subject - Do blondes have more fun? This kind of topic is his real forte.

CECIL or CECILY BAKER unctuous and deeply sincere sounding. Always talking in a reasonable and patient tone, rather slowly and over--emphatically. He addresses himself to the audience [both studio and real] as if all his speeches are public propaganda for his party - which is how they need to come over. He is not a 'nasty' character, like Tim, but should be seen as hopelessly out-of-touch with the reality of problems in schools, in fact a 'typical' politician.

#### OTHER CHARACTERS

The other characters in the play are meant to be doubled. None of them are very fully drawn so I will just give you some 'handles' on each. Care must be taken to differentiate between, for instance, the two teachers, or the three bully girls, to add life and interest to the scenes.

ANNOUNCER - patient, bright voice, patronising.

CUE CARD HOLDER - doesn't speak, face reflects whatever is on her card.

DEREK - Sandra's brother [could be Erica, her sister.] one-year older than Sandra. They don't get on. First scene - cheery and punchy direct address. Second scene - the kitchen scene - mean tone of voice, dripping with sarcasm. End speech - Sincere.

LOUISE - the main bully, very much kingpin - confident stance, hard stare, etc.

NICOLA - tries to copy Louise, but always looks to her for reassurance, a fusser, sucks up to teachers as well as to Louise

SUZANNE - hangs back a little from the other two, unsure of herself, a follower

TEACHER 1 - may be slightly older. A 'fair' character, but used to making snap decisions, so she misses things. Play her with more authority than Teacher 2.

TEACHER 2 - works better if this teacher is played as very young. Friends with Teacher 1 and follows her lead in most things. A sympathetic character, especially in her role at the end.

SANDRA'S MUM - only has the one scene in the kitchen and a closing speech. She is obviously a good caring mum, willing to listen. Derek diverts her attention from Sandra's misery in the scene but it should be clear that Sandra could have, and probably should have, talked to her.

LADY 1 - an old biddy with verbal diarrhoea. Speak rapidly and hardly draws breath to make the point that if Tim hadn't interrupted she would still be holding forth.

LADY 2 - sympathetic middle-aged woman, sensible no-nonsense tone

MAN 1 - strong confident voice. Quite macho.

MAN 2 - a rather weedy man, self-effacing and over-sensitive

YOUNG WOMAN - perhaps a psycho-therapist or similar. Someone who's very keen on understanding and forgiveness. Angry at the general response of the programme to Sandra's problems.

THE VOICES - are first of all the inner thoughts of Sandra as written in her diary and then the second time they are the voices of the studio audience.

PUPILS 1,2 &3 - pretty well interchangeable 'typical' Year 7/8 kids

If you are using this for an exam-piece - the three main parts are examinable. The Teachers, both of them, are quite meaty parts as are, at a pinch, Sandra's Mum and Derek. The others would need doubling to give them sufficient material. This of course has the advantage of showing a student's abilities to change themselves and adopt different voices and suitable body language.

## SETTING

It is essential that there is a large open space covering as much of the centre and forestage as possible.

On one side of the stage, angled so that we can see them clearly, and, if possible raked in two or three tiers, are the seats - benches possibly - for the studio audience. When not used in a scene, all the cast except Sandra, Tim and Cecil Baker go back to their seat here. The Cue-card Holder - who will obviously be playing other parts too - ought to sit on the bottom row of the tier, next to the wings with her various cards next to her.

Cecil Baker's seat needs to be separated a little from this. Perhaps there could be two comfortable armchairs or leather chairs - or even a sofa - chat-show style - set towards the back centre, slightly angled towards the studio audience. Sandra's chair, to emphasise her isolation, could be in the downstage corner on the same side as the studio audience seats. On the opposite side of the stage there needs to be some scaffolding - perhaps a scaffolding tower with the top platform lowered - disguised, if you like as an entrance, as previously suggested, with a glitzy glitter curtain or similar. Through this, Tim and guests could come. If preferred - and you have room - the scaffolding could be thrust out away from the stage into the theatre or studio itself - accessible from a corner of the stage but not visible until you choose it to be at the end. In this case you might balance the stage by having the armchairs/sofa further downstage on the opposite side to the studio audience.

Wake up the stage and give visual interest by having bright coloured cushions on the armchair. In the centre at the back of the stage could be a free-standing flat, brightly coloured, with 'Talk with Tim' blazoned across it in huge script. If scaffolding is kept off the stage, then this could be the entrance for the guests and for Tim. There is always an opportunity for such as Louise to get behind this unseen in the shadow whilst something is going on in the central lit area.

You might like to give the whole thing a more Brechtian feel by having this back flat as a blank white screen on which slides can be projected. These could include a 'Talk with Tim' logo, close-ups of Sandra's face, pictures of kids in groups - bullying pictures and so on, to give the whole play a broader context. If this idea is used, try 'setting the scene' for each section by having pictures of Margate - [or similar sea-side town], a typical neat semi as Sandra's home, and so on. If there is time, preparing such backgrounds can be a lot of fun. The screen will take colour nicely too, so for instance can just have deep-red lighting on it as a background to the Voices/Diary scene....



