



# News in Review

May 2000

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### Reena Virk: A Senseless Death

Violence in North American society is a topic that is reflected in popular media and is often the premise of so-called reality television shows. However, real-life violence as experienced by the victims and their families has a meaning and a dimension that few individuals can truly feel or appreciate. The tragic and horrifying case of the murder of Reena Virk, and the trials of her killers, is one of those seemingly incomprehensible social events that can evoke feelings of despair and hopelessness for the average citizen. And yet, as painful as it is, we must attempt to come to terms with the darkest elements in human society. If we do not learn something from cases such as the apparently meaningless murder of a young teenager by her peers, we will in a significant way have failed the victim, in this case, Reena Virk.

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# News in Review

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## Introduction

### Reena Virk: A Senseless Death

Canadians were shocked when they first heard the story: a 14-year-old girl beaten and drowned by her peers and it happened not in a big dangerous North American city but in an idyllic suburb of picturesque Victoria, B.C. Reena Virk was murdered on November 14, 1997, after being lured by friends to a party under a secluded bridge. Six youths were later charged and convicted of aggravated assault; two were tried for second degree murder. All were between 14 and 17 when the crime was committed, seven of the eight were females. Warren Paul Glowatski, the only male involved in the crime, was convicted in adult court in 1999 of the murder of Reena Virk and given a life sentence. Because he was only 16 when the murder was committed, he will be eligible for parole after serving seven years. In April 2000, Kelly Marie Ellard, only 14 years old when the crime was committed, was also convicted of second degree murder and given a life sentence. She will be eligible for parole in five years. The public was horrified by the apparent lack of feeling and the brutality of the young murderers, and in the months following Reena's death Canadians engaged in a public debate in the media over numerous controversial and at times conflicting issues. The violent and cruel death of Reena Virk has disturbed something deep at the core of Canadian society. Reena Virk was a troubled and lonely youth. In a society that worships thinness and beauty, Virk was seen as chubby and not considered attractive in the contemporary sense of the word, especially in the adolescent sub-culture. In a community that was

mainly Caucasian, Virk was also a member of a visible minority. She wanted desperately to fit in, but was constantly being bullied; some believe she was bullied to death. It is perhaps the bullying, the unjust and unwarranted victimization of someone considered lesser, that touched a nerve in Canadian society. Virk's death and the recent experience of the role bullying played in the school shootings in Littleton, Colorado, and Taber, Alberta, have also brought the issue to the forefront for researchers and safe-school committees across the country. The murder of Reena Virk raises the question once again of what can be done to protect our youth from bullies and from accepting or even learning bullying behaviour. Concerns have also been expressed about the relationship of the amount of ubiquitous violence that young people are exposed to daily through television, films, video games, and music lyrics and the occurrence of aggressive, violent, bullying behaviour.

Many critics of the Young Offenders Act and the new Youth Criminal Justice Act, which has replaced it, point to the supposed leniency of these pieces of legislation as the reason for the increase in youth crime. Others suggest that youth crime has not actually gone up but that shocking, high-profile, but relatively isolated events have distorted public perception. Statistics do indicate, however, that the amount of youth crime committed by females has definitely increased over the past few years. As researchers struggle to find out why, it is important to remember the victims of such crimes. It is important to remember Reena Virk and her family.

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# News in Review

May 2000

## A Question of Complicity

### Reena Virk: A Senseless Death

The body of Reena Virk lay in the water several hundred feet away from where she was killed but was not discovered until eight days after she was beaten and drowned. While the police and the community were actively searching for her, rumours were circulating around the school that Virk had attended of her murder on the night of November 14, 1997. The perpetrators allegedly bragged about their role in her death. And yet no one came forward with information to help the police in their search.

Children learn very early an essential code of the playground: never to tell on someone, especially one's friends. This kind of bonding behaviour has itself been the subject of research and debate as to its significance in terms of social values and behavioural patterns. Such a problematic and dubious code of loyalty is something that all young people understand and experience in greater or lesser ways.

#### Peer Pressure

Before watching this News in Review report, discuss the impact the unspoken never tell code has on your behaviour. When do you think it is right or wrong to inform an authority about the wrongdoing of someone? Would you ever tell someone in a position of authority about something a close friend did wrong? In what situations? Why is this an important issue for society as a whole? What are the implications in society as a whole of not publicly acknowledging wrongdoing?

### Acceptance

To never tell on a friend is not the only rule in the complicated world of a teenager's life. Many other rules go unspoken, but are just as powerful. While watching this video report, list the unspoken rules that the perpetrators of this crime believed Reena Virk broke. Why did they perceive that it was okay to attack and beat her and ultimately to kill her? Why and how did they decide she did not belong? How did a lack of acceptance play a role in this terrible crime?

### Public Perception

After watching the video, discuss your perception of the school that Reena Virk attended. Do you think the school was depicted fairly in the video? Most of the students at Shoreline Community School did not know Reena Virk, who was frequently absent from school she attended classes in the semester before her death fewer than 10 times and were unaware of the plans to swarm her that night, or of the rumours afterward. Jeremy Hanman and Kelly Leach were both students at Shoreline Community School at the time of Virk's death. Neither of them knew her. Both told Chatelaine magazine in 1998 that they felt that they were being targeted just for being teenagers and that their school has been unfairly portrayed as gang-infested and rife with violence. Leach asked, Where were the media when almost half our students made the honour and effort rolls, or raised money for starving kids or did good things in the community?

What was the role of the media and media consumers in this event? Could such an incident happen at any school? At your school?

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# News in Review

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## The Lord of the Flies Syndrome

### Reena Virk: A Senseless Death

On November 14, 1997, two girls from Shoreline School, a junior high school in Saanich, B.C., thought that Reena Virk was trying to steal one of the girl's boyfriends and was spreading rumours about them around school. They decided that she should be punished. They called Virk up and invited her to party with them that evening. They agreed to meet in the parking lot of a neighbourhood Wal-Mart. After meeting with some other girls, most of whom were 14 or 15 years old, the group went to the back field of Shoreline School, where they met with an even larger crowd. Most of the teens were drinking heavily, and the party soon got a bit rowdy. The police arrived when someone broke a school window, and they made the group disperse. From there, a group of students, including Virk, moved to a nearby park, where they continued the party under a bridge and away from the public view. It was there that Virk was finally confronted. One of the girls accused her of stealing her boyfriend and stubbed out her burning cigarette on Virk's forehead. Virk lashed out to protect herself and a group of teens started to swarm her. She was repeatedly kicked and beaten by at least eight teens, mostly other girls, some of whom didn't really even know her. Many others stood around and watched.

After about five minutes, one of the group members involved in the assault told the others to stop, saying that Virk had had enough. The group dispersed and Virk got up and staggered slowly and painfully across the bridge. Two members of the

group, Kelly Ellard and Warren Paul Glowatski, were accused of returning after the rest of the group left and of following Virk. Once again they attacked her. This time she was kicked repeatedly in the head. The pathologist testifying at Glowatski's trial said that Virk received 12 to 18 blows to the head and face, and had a bruise on the back of her head showing the pattern from the sole of a running shoe. Her brain was swollen from the beating and she had other severe internal injuries such as a crushed small bowel and a bruised liver. She was dragged down to the river and drowned. Many witnesses testified that Ellard had bragged that she held Virk's head under the water with her foot while she calmly smoked a cigarette.

Many journalists, when writing about the beating and drowning death of Reena Virk, compared the events of that terrible night to the events described in William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*. This book, studied in high school English classes across Canada, addresses the philosophical questions of human nature and the nature of evil, in particular the mob mentality that takes over when the thin veneer of civilization is breached. The novel questions the notion that humans are essentially good and that in terms of the entire population of human beings there are really only a few social deviants capable of violent crimes such as murder. It makes us ponder whether we are all capable of atrocious acts if caught up in the moment or if circumstances encourage or permit random violent behaviour. Like *Lord of the Flies*, the Reena Virk case questions why civilizing mechanisms did not prevent her attackers from reverting to predatory behaviour.

In *Lord of the Flies* a key scene occurs when the boys from a private school who have survived a plane crash on a remote island have adopted primitive, tribal behaviour and without any apparent reason begin to act out aggression, moving in a circling fashion and chanting. One of them, Roger, mimes the terror of a pig. Two of the main characters, Piggy and Ralph, find themselves eager to participate in this demented but partly secure society. Golding describes them as feeling glad to touch the brown backs of the fence that hemmed in the terror and made it governable. Soon, savage cries of "Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!" are heard, and the frenetic energy and behaviour of these formerly well-mannered school boys increases. Not only does the swarming behaviour increase but it begins to beat like a steady pulse. At this point in the game, Roger ceases to be a pig and becomes instead a hunter. Some of the smaller boys form their own ring and emulate the older members of the group. Soon there are two separate but

complementary circles. The circling increases as if repetition would achieve safety of itself. The boys begin to behave as one unit, like a pack of wild animals. At this point in the novel reference is made to a thing . . . crawling out of the forest and the cries of Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood! are heard again. Finally, the game becomes real; actual violence occurs. The beast was on its knees in the centre, its arms folded over its face. . . . The beast struggled forward, broke the ring and fell over the steep edge of the rock to the sand by the water. One of the boys is killed. Immediately, the mob, instead of becoming calmer, becomes even more vicious. There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws.

### **Discussion and Activities**

1. Read this actual passage from Lord of the Flies, in chapter four. How does Golding's description make us see and feel the primitive nature of the events and the beastly behaviour of the boys?
2. To what extent do the events described in this passage of Lord of the Flies recall or parallel the events that happened in Victoria, B.C., on November 14, 1997?
3. English scholar V.S. Pritchett writes of William Golding's novel, In Lord of the Flies we understand that the children . . . reflect the concern of the modern world which has seen its communities destroyed. The children in Lord of the Flies simply re-enact the adult, communal drama and by their easy access to the primitive, show how adult communities can break up. To what extent do the recent highly publicized incidents of teen violence (Reena Virk, Littleton, Taber) reflect society as a whole? Do you think society is becoming more violent?

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# News in Review

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## Bullying Behaviour

### Reena Virk: A Senseless Death

Although the murder of Reena Virk is an extreme example of violent behaviour inflicted on and perpetrated by school-aged people, the disturbing reality is that violence happens on a daily basis in the hallways and on the playgrounds of our schools. Bullying is of great concern to teachers, parents, administrators, and students. Many schools are setting up safe-school committees to deal with this distressing problem.

#### What Is Bullying?

Bullying is defined as the repeated and systematic harassment of individuals through such overt actions as physical violence, verbal taunts, threats, and intimidation, extortion, or stealing and more covert methods such as social exclusion, rumours, and manipulation of friendships. Studies show that about 15 per cent of students are involved in a bullying relationship at school; approximately nine per cent as victims and seven per cent as perpetrators. Bullying occurs more in the early grades and tends to taper off by the time students attend high school. Boys are more likely to use overt methods of bullying than girls, girls tend to use more subtle, indirect methods.

#### Discussion

1. Research the words overt and covert. What do they mean? Suggest specific examples of overt and covert forms of bullying.
2. Do you think it is possible for teachers and/or parents to monitor both overt and covert methods of bullying? Which form

would be easier to detect?

3. Based upon your observations, do you think that 15 per cent is an accurate assessment of the number of students who are either bullied or who themselves bully?

What Causes Bullying?

There are several different factors that can lead a young person to bully other students. These fall into three separate areas: family, individual, and school factors.

#### Family Factors

Studies have shown that most bullies come from similar family backgrounds. At home, the child frequently experiences a lack of attention and warmth. In addition, the child often sees aggressive behaviour being modelled in the home either by being the victim of violence directly or by watching other family members being the victim of violence. This teaches the child at a young age that might makes right. Add to this combination a lack of parental supervision and the social circumstances are ripe for the development of bullying behaviour.

#### Individual Factors

Studies show that children who bully tend to have an active and impulsive temperament. Frequently they are physically larger and stronger than their classmates (This is more true of boys who bully than of girls) but it should be noted that not all physically strong and active students are bullies in fact the majority are not. It is only when the individual factors are found in conjunction with the other factors that a child might engage in bullying behaviour.

#### School Factors

Although teachers and school administrators cannot influence the family and individual make-up of their students, they can influence the opportunities for violence and bullying in and around the school. The incidents of bullying decrease as the amount of supervision on the playground and in the hallways and cafeteria increases. When an adult sees an incident occurring, it is very important that the adult immediately intervene and that appropriate action be taken. This ensures that the perpetrator knows and understands that bullying behaviour will not be tolerated and also that the victim understands that he or she has support within the school. A supportive school environment is a very important antidote to bullying, hindering its occurrence and proliferation. If a school has a warm and accepting atmosphere the incidents of bullying go down. An accepting environment often starts with the teachers. A teacher must ensure that he or she models appropriate behaviour to the students, since any anti-bullying program could be undermined if a teacher adopts

bullying behaviour toward students. It must be emphasized that bullying behaviour can also be verbal, and a teacher who wittingly or unwittingly belittles a student alone or in front of other students becomes a negative role model condoning bullying behaviour. In addition, many school boards are developing specific anti-bullying curricula and codes of conduct that set out administrative policies regarding bullying.

### Discussion

1. What policies does your school have in place to stop bullying behaviour? Are those policies effective? Why or why not?
2. Where does bullying behaviour occur most frequently in your school? What types of bullying occur most often? What actions could be taken by teachers, parents, administrators, and fellow students to stop bullying behaviour?
3. Do you think there are other factors, in addition to those listed above, that could work together to create a bully?

### Who Is Being Bullied?

Just as there is a profile for the typical bully, victims also often share similar characteristics with each other. Studies show that many victims are quiet and shy. When being bullied they do not retaliate in any way. They often lack friends and social support at school. They are not confident in their physical abilities or strength. Most victims do not report bullying behaviour because they are afraid of retaliation and ashamed that they can't protect themselves. Many feel that their peers and adults will be angry at them if they tell, and some are resigned to the idea that adults will not be able to protect them on the playground, in the hallways or when they are travelling to and from school. They feel powerless.

### Discussion

1. In what ways did Reena Virk fit the profile of someone who was a victim of bullying?
2. Is there social pressure in your school not to tell? What are some of the problems caused by the 'don't tell' peer pressure?
3. Brainstorm with your class on some ways to help victims of bullying.

### What Are the Effects of Bullying?

Bullying behaviour causes harm to more than just the victims. The long-term effects of bullying behaviour are also harmful on the perpetrators and onlookers. The victims of bullying often experience unhappiness, fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem. They start avoiding school and other social situations. Their low self-esteem often interferes with their social, academic, and emotional adjustment. The anxiety and low self-esteem associated with being a victim of bullying is one of the most common reasons cited for teen suicide. Bullies can also be hurt

by bullying behaviour. With earlier aggressive behaviour left unchecked, bullies often become aggressive adults. Studies show that adults who were bullies as children have a much higher than average chance of being convicted of multiple criminal charges. In addition to the victims and perpetrators of bullying, onlookers are also hurt by bullying behaviour. Although they will not initiate bullying behaviour, they often will follow the lead of the bully out of fear. When they see that there are no negative consequences to bullying, chances are they will become more aggressive in the future.

### Discussion

Sometimes victims of bullying decide to fight back. Study the events reviewed in the News in Review story *Children in Trouble: Guns in Schools* (September, 1999). What role did bullying play in the cases studied? What was the effect on the onlookers, on the community as a whole? How did viewing the beating of Reena Virk affect the onlookers?

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# News in Review

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## A Sociopathic Trend?

Reena Virk: A Senseless Death

With the rash of recent highly publicized incidents of youth violence, many people are lamenting the downfall of the younger generation. Newspaper headlines suggest this sentiment over and over again: The trouble with kids today, The dark side of our exotic youth, The Monsters Next Door: What Made them Do it? An editorial in the Victoria Times Colonist suggested that teens today are the new existentialists or nihilists, because of their utter lack of concern about the consequences of their actions, to themselves or others.

But is this view of rampant youth violence and moral disintegration accurate? Hasn't every older generation said something similar about young people? As Tony Doob, a criminologist at University of Toronto, points out, We always hear people saying youth crime is going up and trying to explain why; failure of society, violence on television, and so on. Let's not talk about violence on television, let's talk about the fact it's not going up. Why are we trying to explain why it's going up when it's not going up?

It is important to put such issues into perspective by looking at the story the statistics tell. According to Statistics Canada, the crime rate for the overall population in Canada has dropped 28 per cent since 1994. Youth crime has dropped four per cent during this same period. In 1997-98, there were 110 883 cases processed by youth courts across Canada. A majority of these

cases related to property crimes such as shoplifting, vandalism, and mischief. Violent youth crime accounted for 23 711 cases processed by youth courts; 10 535 of these were minor assaults including pushing, slapping, punching and face-to-face verbal threats. Murder and manslaughter have accounted for less than one per cent of cases heard since 1992.

On average 40-50 teens are charged with murder every year in Canada. In 1998, there were 48 murder and 13 manslaughter cases processed by the youth courts. Although at first glance this might seem like a lot, the number has to be considered in proportion to the total youth population. The percentage of youth involved in violent crime is still exceptionally low and has not increased in the last 20 years.

The only significant shift in the statistics surrounding violent youth crime relates to crimes committed by young women. While males were accused of 5.6 per cent fewer violent crimes in 1998 than they were in 1995, almost 14 per cent more females were charged. Young women now make up 22.5 per cent of youth crime, up from 16 per cent in 1987. Some of the more notorious violent crimes committed in Canada by female young offenders in recent years have been:

In 1997, the police in London, Ontario, charged a 13-year-old girl with attempted murder of a nine-year-old boy who was stabbed with a knife in the neck.

On July 2, 1997, a 17-year-old girl was charged with first-degree murder in the shooting death of her 50-year-old mother in Boucherville, Quebec.

In December 1995, in Burnaby, British Columbia, three girls two 14, one 16 were charged with the beating and drowning death of Alexis Bonilla, a 17-year-old alleged pimp and member of the Latino Assassins gang.

On October 26, 1995, Sylvain Leduc, 17, and three other teenagers were abducted and tortured by members of the Ace Crew gang from Ottawa. Leduc died, the others survived. A 17-year-old girl, along with three adults, was charged with first degree murder.

In May 1994, Brian Harris Baylen, 44, of Mississauga, Ontario, was stabbed to death in a botched robbery attempt by a 14-year-old girl and a 16-year-old boy while he was on a midnight stroll. Since the perpetrators of these crimes are young women and do not fit the stereotype of the sweet, innocent, and docile young girl, many Canadians have a hard time understanding how such crimes are possible. Some media critics say that a disproportionate amount of time is spent reporting on and analyzing these crimes since they are still relatively unusual

occurrences and therefore exceptionally newsworthy. Overall, youth crime has not increased, but as a result of the public interest and media coverage of cases like that of Reena Virk, the public perception is that it has. In a study conducted by Tony Doob in 1997, it was found that 79 per cent of Ontario people surveyed thought youth homicides had increased.

### Discussion

1. Why do you think young women are committing more violent crimes than they were in the past?
2. Do you agree with the statement by Tony Doob that too much attention is being paid to youth crime, considering the crime rate has not gone up?
3. Look up the definitions for existentialist and nihilist. Do you think that these are accurate descriptions for youth today? Why or why not?

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# News in Review

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## The Youth Criminal Justice Act

### Reena Virk: A Senseless Death

In 1999 the federal government of Canada proposed the new Youth Criminal Justice Act to replace the Young Offenders Act, some would say as a response to the public perception that the youth crime rate is running rampant. The new act has been severely criticized from both those who feel it is too harsh and those who feel it is too lenient. As you examine both sides of this debate, summarize in point form the main arguments.

#### Too Harsh

Some experts in fields related to youth crime believe that the new and tougher Youth Criminal Justice Act is a response to an imaginary youth crime wave. As Sibylle Artz, director of the University of Victoria's school of child and youth care points out, Canada is not in a youth-crime crisis. Only 15 per cent of all crimes committed in Canada are committed by youths; the adult population is responsible for the other 85 per cent. Another public misconception, according to Adrian Brooks, a Victoria lawyer who defended Kelly Ellard in the second-degree murder case of Reena Virk, is that the Young Offenders Act is too clement. He was quoted as saying, "The Young Offenders Act is not lenient. We incarcerate young people at a rate higher than adults. I think [the new legislation] is an attempt to get tougher, in the sense of let's put more in jail younger. That's no answer at all."

According to Brooks, by putting younger teens into custody we are just creating more hardened criminals at an earlier age. The

aim of the law should be: How do we keep kids out of custody and learning everything in jail? With this, we're going to have more 14- and 15-year-olds in custody learning from 16- and 17-year-olds.

Those who support this point of view suggest that Canada should instead look at non-adversarial techniques based on models established by native peoples. In New Zealand the government established a family group conferencing system at the urging of the Maori people, and in Melbourne, Australia, they will not bring young people into the court system until there is a plan for their rehabilitation. One positive change to the Act, according to Brooks, is that under the new law there is greater opportunity to closely supervise a young offender after he or she is released from custody. There are opportunities there but I hope they don't get lost in the rush to put them in jail.

### Too Lenient

In a news release issued in March 1999, the Attorney General of Ontario, Charles Harnick, blasted the new legislation as being nothing more than a cosmetic change to the existing law.

It's the same book with a new cover. This new bill seems tough, but when you scratch the surface it's essentially the YOA in a new jacket. The real test of the Youth Criminal Justice Act is how it deals with violent offenders. Like the Young Offenders Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act is woefully soft on violent offenders. Harnick believes that 16- and 17-year-olds who commit violent crimes should automatically be tried as adults; currently there is no guarantee that a young person will be sentenced as an adult even for murder, aggravated sexual assault, manslaughter, or attempted murder. For most serious violent offences it is still a requirement that the prosecutor prove that an adult sentence is necessary. Even when a youth is convicted and sentenced as an adult for murder, he or she is still subject to more lenient parole eligibility than adults sentenced for the same crime. Harnick also believes that mandatory jail time should be required for youths convicted of an offence involving a weapon.

Harnick stated, Under this new act, a three-time rapist could still be treated as a child. Rape, drug trafficking, guns these are adult crimes and have to be treated as such. In the Youth Criminal Justice Act, there are no guarantees that serious violent crime will be treated as adult crime.

### Discussion and Activities

1. What do you think is meant by non-adversarial techniques

when dealing with young offenders? Why would a non-adversarial technique be any different from current techniques? Research the family group conferencing system used in New Zealand. How does it differ from the system used in Canada?

2. Review the arguments by those who feel the new act is too lenient and those who feel it is too harsh. With whom do you agree? Why? Write a letter to your member of Parliament, outlining your feelings about the new legislation.
3. Why do you think public perception is that violent youth crimes have increased?
4. Invite a lawyer to speak to your class on the issue of youth crime, youth criminal legislation, and the reasons why in Canada we differentiate between young and adult offenders.
5. Research the renewed controversy over the Stephen Truscott case, a man who, as a 14-year-old, was charged with the murder of a young girl. The CBC's fifth estate recently broadcast a documentary on this case, which is over 30 years old. Why was this case a legal landmark in terms of how the courts deal with young offenders? Present your findings to the class.

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School Colours  
A Place Called Dixon



10<sup>th</sup>

# News in Review

May 2000

## A Popular Response

### Reena Virk: A Senseless Death

Folk singer Dan Bern wrote a song called Kid s Prayer in June 1998 after hearing about the high school shootings in Springfield, Oregon. (For the complete lyrics of his song, visit his Web site at [www.dbhp.com](http://www.dbhp.com)). A live version of the song was released after the tragedy in Littleton, Colorado, with proceeds going to the Children s Defense Fund. In the song Bern writes a prayer for all children in the hopes of stopping future violence. He also outlines what different theorists have suggested are the causes of youth violence.

He suggests in the song the consternation and confusion that people feel when he says,

And all the world descends and offers up their condolence  
And offers up their theories what went wrong  
And who and why and when and how.

He also suggests that there is no easy answer when he says,

It s all the killing day and night on television  
It s all the movies where violence is as natural as breathing  
It s guns and bullets as easily obtainable as candy  
It s video games where you kill and begin to think it s real  
It s people not having God in their lives anymore  
Or it s all of it, or none of it, or some of it, in various combinations.

Many other public figures and people of influence have also commented on youth violence. After reading the following statements, summarize in your own words what the individual is saying and write a personal response to the statement.

The authorities need to have some tools to deal with kids who are out hanging around on the street at two a.m. People are more accountable for their dogs than their children. If your dog is loose the SPCA picks it up and you get fined. View Royal, B.C., Mayor Bill Camden

I ve noticed rap is booming right now. The lyrics, what they re saying, I think kids are absorbing that and going crazy. Some artists are violent. That s why teens are violent these days. There s a bad side to rap that influences teens. That s sad. Cuong Tang, floor supervisor at A and B Sound in Victoria

This sort of thing can happen anywhere. And the fact that this did happen should not mask the fact that the majority of these kids are going to school every day, they have good family life, go to church, do volunteer work or have part-time jobs. It s not representative of the community going to hell. Dan Koenig, sociology professor, University of Victoria.

The behavior of many young girls is being twisted by profound cultural pressures their parents barely understand. Pressures to be sexy, to be popular to be powerful. And when conventional methods of achieving those goals fail, more and more girls are turning to violence. They are taking the attitude that the way to reach power is by being like males. If they can t get what they want, they become enforcers for the group. It s an ugly and painful thing. Sibylle Artz, author of *Sex, Power & the Violent School Girl*

But that cry is too late for Reena Virk and thousands of other young Canadians. For it is not justice that has failed them so much as it is we who have failed them. We have nurtured a generation of children who reject any notion of right or wrong, or even authority. Rules have been set aside. Susan Martinuk columnist for *The Vancouver Province* (May 13, 1998)

#### Discussion and Activities

1. What, if anything, does authority have to do with this news story?
2. When the older generation criticizes the perceived failings of the younger generation, often music is talked about. Why is this?

3. To young children the word behaviour often is a simple concept, that of being good or being bad. Why is human and social behaviour a much more complex issue, especially in this news story?
4. Have rules been set aside? What do you think social rules are? In democratic nations we emphasize respect for the rule of law, a concept that says that no one is above the law, everyone must obey the laws of the land and pay the consequences of breaking them. What is the significance of the rule of law in the Reena Virk story?
5. A lament is an expression of sorrow and grief. Often it is expressed musically. Compose your own lyrics that lament the tragic death of Reena Virk.

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# News in Review

May 2000

## Discussion, Research, and Essay Questions

### Reena Virk: A Senseless Death

1. Research the subject of bullying, using the following Web sites: [www.bullybeware.com](http://www.bullybeware.com); [www.smartparent.com/colorado.htm](http://www.smartparent.com/colorado.htm); [www.violentkids.com](http://www.violentkids.com); [www.yrbe.edu.on.ca/~safesch/bullying1.htm](http://www.yrbe.edu.on.ca/~safesch/bullying1.htm).

Write a report on your findings. How does the address of at least three of these sites reveal its purpose?

2. With your class, create a class code of conduct including both desirable and unacceptable behaviour. Post this code of conduct in a highly visible area in the classroom. What other class projects can you undertake to make your school a safer place?

3. The Greek philosopher Plato maintained that no person consciously does evil but rather only does evil out of ignorance rather than out of intention. Research the philosophy of Plato regarding evil and respond to his viewpoint. Do you agree or disagree? Use examples throughout history to support your answer.

4. Read William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Write a letter to the head of the English department of your school explaining why you believe this book should or should not be included in your school's curriculum.

5. Visit the Web site ([www.dbhq.com](http://www.dbhq.com)) of folk singer Dan Bern and read the lyrics to the song *Kid's Prayer*. If you were to write an instruction manual for parents raising children today, what would it include? Write your own kid's prayer, outlining how you would help future generations behave in non-violent ways.

6. Reena Virk wanted desperately to belong to the group of her

peers that ended up killing her. What can you do to make others in your school feel more accepted? Create a mural exploring the theme of acceptance of other s differences.

7. Debate with your class the role that violence in the media plays in youth violence today. Obtain and study other News in Review stories as suggested in Comprehensive News in Review Study Modules on page 57 of this resource guide.

8. Prepare a research paper comparing the former Young Offenders Act and the new Youth Criminal Justice Act.

9. Read the Canadian novel Cat s Eye by Margaret Atwood. In it a successful painter remembers her youth and how she was bullied and terrorized by her three best friends. Compare the bullying behaviour of girls in the 1950s to that of today. How is it similar? How does it differ?

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