

NEWBERY MEDAL WINNER

REBECCA STEAD

GOODBYE  
STRANGER



**SCHOOL COUNSELORS' GUIDE  
TO RUNNING A BOOK GROUP FOR GIRLS**

**Includes American School Counselor Association Standards Correlations**



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Dear School Counselor,

Middle school is an exciting time for students, one defined by both personal and developmental growth and change. Students are facing many conflicting emotions and experiences, including physical growth, developing self-identity, peer pressure, and curiosity about the world as they transition from childhood to adolescence.

Students may be referred to you for additional social and emotional support. School counselors can offer students more concentrated support through small counseling groups. A book group is a fun and engaging way to address your students' social and emotional needs.

*Goodbye Stranger* by Rebecca Stead is a meaningful and relatable story for today's middle school students. Stead addresses issues of identity, bullying, and cyberbullying. The novel tells a hopeful and uplifting story with endearing characters that will keep young readers engaged from beginning to end.

*Goodbye Stranger* has strong female characters, which makes it an ideal choice for a girls' group. Using American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Standards for Students as a guideline, I have developed a curriculum you can use to run your own small group. Although these lessons may be used in the classroom, they are designed specifically for a supportive and nurturing girls' group. By reading *Goodbye Stranger* and exploring the major themes in a small group setting, you will be providing girls with a safe and supportive environment to share their own stories.

I am confident that you and your students will thoroughly enjoy *Goodbye Stranger*. I hope you find this counseling group to be a meaningful and rewarding experience for you and your students.

Be well,



Laura Barbour, MA

**Laura Barbour, MA**, has taught and counseled children from preschool through high school in a variety of educational and mental-health settings for twenty-five years. She presently works as an elementary professional school counselor at Stafford Primary School in West Linn, Oregon. Laura also runs empowerment groups for girls and has a private practice counseling children and adolescents.



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# BOOK GROUP DAY One

## Define Group

Explain that the purpose of the group is to read and discuss the book *Goodbye Stranger* together. This is an opportunity for the girls to get better acquainted, share common experiences, and discover ways they can support one another.

## Icebreaker

Icebreakers are an effective way to help students get to know one another by talking and sharing. Invite the girls to grab a handful of candies, such as M&M's. For each piece of candy, they will share something important about themselves. Make sure each girl has a turn to share. This is a fun way for the girls to connect and discover commonalities.

## Introduce Book

Explain why you chose *Goodbye Stranger* for the book group. Hand out copies of *Goodbye Stranger* to the girls, along with a list of which chapters should be read before each group meeting. Understand that this book is impossible to put down, so some of the girls may read ahead. Relevant passages of the book may be read together each week during group. Also, hand out journals for the girls to take notes and write about relevant experiences and thoughts while reading the book.

## Set Expectations for Group

- Explain the meaning of confidentiality as it applies to the book group: *What is said in here stays in here unless it is a threat of harm to self or others*. Explain the importance of confidentiality for building trust within the group.
- Discuss and agree upon expectations for the group (e.g., we show up on time; we show each other respect; we listen to each other; etc.)
- Invite the girls to name the group. They can brainstorm names, nominate three, and vote for one.
- Agree on time and place to meet each week.

# BOOK GROUP DAY TWO

## ASCA PERSONAL/SOCIAL DOMAIN

Standard A: Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.

### Identity/Self-Image

Suggested dialogue: “Today we are going to explore ways that we define ourselves and group identity. We will discuss how you see yourself and how others see you. One of your jobs as a middle school student is to explore a variety of interests and talents and find friends who share your values and interests.”

### Chalk Talk

You may begin each group with a chalk talk. Write a question or direction on a whiteboard, chalkboard, or poster board. As the girls arrive for group, they can write their responses on the board. Allow time to read and discuss the girls’ responses. This is a great way to introduce the topic of the day.

Example: *Write one word you use to describe yourself and one word a friend would use to describe you.*

### Discussion

- The seventh graders in *Goodbye Stranger* attend a mandatory club fair with thirty clubs to choose from: “[T]wo hundred seventh graders, all looking for someplace they belonged” (p. 37). If you attended the club fair, which club would you join (Chess, Hindi, French, Human Rights, Drama, Sports, Robotics, Photography, Tech Crew)?
- Do you define yourself by your group of friends, your grades, your appearance, sports, or talents? What defines you?
- What do you see when you look in the mirror? Do you see yourself as your friends and family see you?
- Does your identity change when you are alone, with friends, with family, at school, or online?

### Activity

Invite the girls to create a collage to represent their identity with images from a variety of magazines. This will be a fun art activity for the girls and will give you insight into each girl’s sense of self. Keep the conversation focused on the subject of personal and social identity.

### Closing

“Do you define yourself by who you are or what you do? As you grow up, what you do for fun will change, but who you are on the inside will stay the same.” Allow some quiet time for the girls to reflect and write in their journals.

# BOOK GROUP DAY Three

## ASCA PERSONAL/SOCIAL DOMAIN

Standard A: Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.

### Relationships

Suggested dialogue: “Today we are going to explore how you relate with yourself and others. Your friendships are essential to your happiness. Girls naturally connect and bond by sharing their personal thoughts and feelings, so it is important to choose your friends wisely.”

### Chalk Talk

*What is love?*

### Discussion

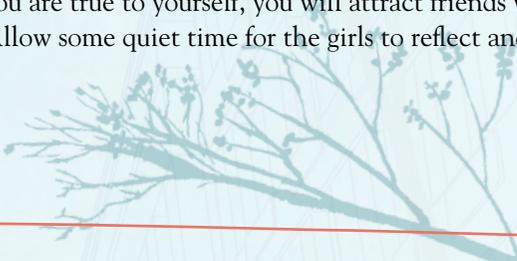
- Which character in *Goodbye Stranger* are you most like?
- Do you emulate the qualities you admire in others?
- Do you prefer to have one best friend or do you like to be part of a group?
- Do you enjoy having a variety of friends in different social groups? Are you friends with both boys and girls?
- Bridge, Tab, and Emily formed a set in fourth grade because Bridge decided she was allergic to clubs. The girls agreed to one rule: “No fighting” (p. 15). What are the rules in your group of friends?
- “[T]he Berperson says the most important thing is to be true to yourself.” “But what’s ‘yourself’? That’s the problem. What if I don’t know?” “Then I guess you should just . . . be true” (p. 235). What does it mean to be true to you?

### Activity

“Think about the qualities you admire in your friends and create a list of friendship qualities. Review the list and put a star beside all the qualities that describe you.” Have each girl share her list with the group. Create a list of collective admirable qualities to share with the group as a reminder of the qualities we seek in our friendships.

### Closing

“Be comfortable and confident with who you are and what you believe in! When you are true to yourself, you will attract friends with common interests and values.” Allow some quiet time for the girls to reflect and write in their journals.



# BOOK GROUP DAY Four

## ASCA PERSONAL/SOCIAL DOMAIN

Standard B: Students will make decisions, set goals, and take necessary action to achieve goals.

Standard C: Students will understand safety and survival skills.

### Digital Citizenship

Suggested dialogue: “It is essential that we discuss digital safety, responsibility, and citizenship, as more and more people are finding friendship and community online through social media.”

### Chalk Talk

*What forms of technology and social media do you use?*

### Discussion

- What is acceptable use of technology at school?
- How do the rules at school compare to your rules at home?
- Why do you think these rules are important? Why do your teachers and parents expect you to follow these rules?
- What are the rights and responsibilities of digital citizens?
- Emily is texting with her crush, Patrick. They text but don’t talk to each other. “‘Why don’t you and Patrick actually *talk* to each other?’ Tab said. Em looked up. ‘Are you demented? And say what?’” (p. 29) Do you text or talk more with your friends?

### Activity

“There is a saying: ‘Think once before you speak, twice before you act, and three times before you post on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.’ What advice would you give your peers about using social media?” Invite the girls to create posters or a public service announcement for the school. They can hang posters around the school building to remind classmates to think before they post. Show the girls examples of poster and public service announcements, such as “Think Before You Post” and “Kind Texting: Pass It On.”

### Closing

“Think about the ways social media enhances or interferes with your friendships.” Allow some quiet time for the girls to reflect and write in their journals.

# BOOK GROUP DAY Five

## ASCA PERSONAL/SOCIAL DOMAIN

Standard B: Students will make decisions, set goals, and take necessary action to achieve goals.

Standard C: Students will understand safety and survival skills.

### Bullying/Cyberbullying

Suggested dialogue: “Sometimes it’s your friends who hurt you the most, and sometimes you remain friends because you are afraid of what they might say or do to you otherwise. Sometimes even nice people say or do mean things. There are many examples of bullying and cyberbullying in *Goodbye Stranger*.”

### Chalk Talk

List some examples of bullying and cyberbullying from *Goodbye Stranger*.

### Discussion

- Celeste had a friend named Vinny who played mean games like the tasting game and truth or dare. How do you stand up for yourself and others when friends are being mean?
- Julie Hopper stole the photo of Emily from Patrick’s phone and sent it to David Marcel. David texted the picture to his friends, who harassed Emily by calling her names. Whom would you report bullying or cyberbullying to?
- Emily is a girl who feels good about herself. Everyone else likes her too until a private picture becomes public. “But the bad part wasn’t that everyone was looking at the picture. I mean, it was weird and not great. But the bad part was that it felt like they were making fun of my feeling good about the picture. Of me *liking myself*” (p. 172). Why do you think Emily’s classmates turned on her? Is it socially acceptable for a girl to feel good about herself? Discuss why and why not.
- For revenge, Tab posted a picture of Patrick in his underwear. Vinny tagged the picture so everyone in school would see it. How do you avoid this kind of drama with your friends?
- “I’m pretty sure she hates me now. And most of the guys are mad too. They all know I told Mr. Ramos about the picture going around. But Patrick actually texted me to say what I did was cool. He said he didn’t have the guts!” (p. 176) Did Sherm do the right thing by telling? What would you do? Would you risk your friendships to do the right thing?
- The ongoing competition between Jamie and Alex results in Jamie singing to his crush in his underwear in a public place. Alex is a great example of a frenemy. How do you protect yourself from this kind of friendship?

## BOOK GROUP DAY FIVE continued

### Discussion continued

- You are learning how to be a friend, and you may make some mistakes along the way, just as Celeste betrayed her friendship with Gina. “And I was wondering if you still want to be in my world, if you can be my friend, after what I did. Because—I love you. You’re a good friend, a *real* friend. And I really want a friend like you. And I want to be one” (p. 282). What does it mean to be a true friend?

### Activity: Bully Map

Working as a team, challenge the girls to map out each incident of bullying and cyberbullying in *Goodbye Stranger*. The girls will create a large graphic organizer on poster board by listing the characters involved, the role they played, their intent, and who was affected. The primary roles in bullying include aggressor, target, bystander, and upstander. The goal of this activity is to demonstrate that bullying behavior is far reaching and students play different roles in different social situations (e.g., the target of bullying in one situation may become the aggressor in another situation).

### Closing

“What are the agreements among your group of friends? What agreements can you make to avoid drama in your friendships?” Allow some quiet time for the girls to reflect and write in their journals.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

### Bullying

**International Bullying Prevention Association (IBPA)**

[StopBullyingWorld.org](http://StopBullyingWorld.org)

The purpose of the IBPA is to support and enhance quality research-based bullying prevention principles and practices to achieve a safe school climate, healthy work environment, good citizenship, and civic responsibility.

**Pacer Center’s Teens Against Bullying**

[PacerTeensAgainstBullying.org](http://PacerTeensAgainstBullying.org)

The National Bullying Prevention Center’s website, created by teens, provides resources for educators and students.

**Stop Bullying Now**

[StopBullyingNow.com](http://StopBullyingNow.com)

Information, intervention strategies, and advice for those affected by bullying.

### Cyberbullying

**Cyberbullying Research Center**

[CyberBullying.us/resources](http://CyberBullying.us/resources)

The Cyberbullying Research Center is dedicated to providing up-to-date information about the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of cyberbullying among adolescents.

**Netsmartz**

[NetSmartz.org](http://NetSmartz.org)

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children provides online safety resources for parents, educators, children, and teens.

## INTERNET RESOURCES continued

### Digital Citizenship

#### Connect Safely

#### [ConnectSafely.org](http://ConnectSafely.org)

ConnectSafely.org is a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating users of connected technology about safety, privacy, and security.

### Empowering Girls

#### Girls Inc.

#### [GirlsInc.org](http://GirlsInc.org)

Girls Inc. inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and bold by providing transformative experiences and real-world solutions to the unique issues girls face.

#### Girls Leadership

#### [GirlsLeadership.org/programs](http://GirlsLeadership.org/programs)

Girls Leadership teaches girls the skills to know who they are, what they believe in, and how to express it, empowering them to create change in their world.

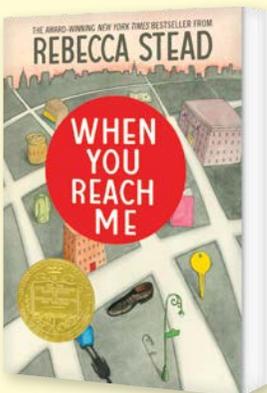
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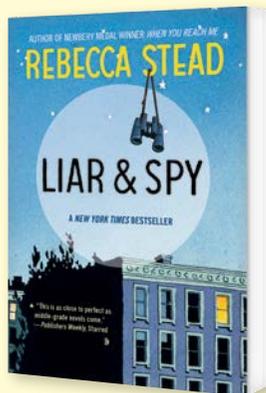
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Stead is the author of three previous books for children. *When You Reach Me*, a *New York Times* bestseller, won the Newbery Medal and the *Boston Globe–Horn Book Award* for Fiction. *Liar & Spy*, also a bestseller, was named a notable book by the *New York Times Book Review* and won the *Guardian Prize* for Children’s Fiction. Her first novel, *First Light*, was named a Best Book for Teens by the New York Public Library. Rebecca lives in New York City with her family. Visit her online at [rebeccasteadbooks.com](http://rebeccasteadbooks.com) and on Twitter at [@rebstead](https://twitter.com/@rebstead).

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