

Read the poem below by Brandon Barnett, a student who explores what it means to be part of the "popular" crowd. Answer the accompanying questions and in small groups, discuss your responses with your classmates.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A POPULAR PERSON

Walking down the hallway you see them,
The popular people,
Your friends.
You know you're one of them,
Some people would kill to be you.

Yet you never felt that you're one of them,
How are you any different from the people you put down?

You play football,
You're smart,
And you wear the right clothes,
Is that all that matters?

But you should forget that now,
It doesn't matter how you treat other people.
You are better than them,
You will always be popular,
Won't you?

People envy you,
Their mere lives hang on every word you say.
They mean nothing to you, But you live on a wire,
If you fall you'll be one of the lesser kids, you'll be a loser.

If you displease one of the cooler kids,
Even just once,
You will fall,
Never to recover,
You will live in shame.

You know everyone is the same,
But why should you care.
You're on the right side,

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In the poem, Brandon ponders, "You play football, you're smart, and you wear the right clothes. Is this all that matters?" What "matters" most at your school? What do you think about this?
2. Brandon talks about living on "a wire," falling and never recovering. What does he mean? What pressure do you feel to be part of a certain group or to avoid associating with another group?
3. Brandon asks himself how he is any different from the people he puts down. How do group labels or cliques serve to divide people and lead to name-calling?
4. Brandon describes never feeling like he was "one of them." Have you ever felt like this? How does it feel to be part of a group (whether you want to be or others just consider you to be)? Or how does it feel to not be associated with any group, if this is the case for you?
5. How does "group name-calling" affect your personal sense of identity and your feelings about yourself?
6. How does "group name-calling" affect your social options at school (who your friends are, what activities you do, etc.)?
7. What do you think it would take to eliminate "group name-calling" at your school? What step could you take in this direction?