

Lesson #10

Gang Violence

“If you want to be in that world, it gets violent, and it gets violent quick,” warned one former gang member while being interviewed in the Winnipeg Remand Centre.

Violence is a regular part of life, whether it's a result of retaliation from other gangs or from discipline within one's own gang. Many gangs hold D-boards (disciplinary boards), where they punish their members for mistakes by beating them up, sometimes in a group and for a set period of time.

Some gang members also commit acts of violence as part of their initiation, during the course of money-making activities such as robberies, or just as part of daily life. One gang member interviewed for this book recalled beating up strangers on the street from a very young age.

“I remember going out with those other guys and having to punch out two people, for two people. Two of us would get out of the car or get off our bikes, and go and stomp someone right out. To see if we had the balls to do it, or to see if we could handle it. It could be anybody: kids, adults, old people.

Back in the day, I didn't know anything else. I just knew violence. I would run away from violence just to be violent towards other people.”

Others say the violence is less regular, and it isn't forced on members from higher-ups. Still, gang members are expected to be tough, and be ready to defend each other using force.

“You're not asked outright, but you're expected to be able to go. I would expect that if I was in a bar and there was a fight going down, that people on the program better step up. You're never told that, but you know that's what's expected of you.”

Whether violence is a daily event or an occasional one, being a gangster is a dangerous job. Michael Chettleburgh is a researcher who studies gangs in Canada. He used the death rates of gang members to calculate how likely a gangster is to die in the course of his “work,” compared to other jobs. Gang members, he said, have a 1 in 164 chance of being killed. This is five to ten times more dangerous than the jobs held by loggers, fishers, oil-rig workers, steelworkers, farmers and coal miners. The death rates for street gang members are more than ten times higher than the death rates of soldiers who served in the Vietnam War.



Literacy Tip: Quotation Marks

Earlier we talked about end punctuation – those punctuation marks used at the end of sentences. Another important punctuation mark is the quotation mark (“ ”). Quotation marks come in pairs and are used to show that someone is speaking. You're probably already fairly familiar with these if you read books, magazines, or newspaper articles. Look back at Exercise #9, for example. Since the reporter is interviewing Alex, everything Alex says out loud is in quotation marks.

End punctuation changes a bit when we use quotation marks. Where statements usually end with a period, we end them with a comma when we're using quotation marks, so that we can add the words “he said” or “she said” to complete the sentence.

For example:

I'm going for a walk.

becomes

“I'm going for a walk,” he said.

If we can already tell who is speaking and don't need to write “he said,” we can continue to use a period to end a sentence in quotation marks.

For example:

I saw Jonah leaving the house angrily, so I stopped to ask him what was up.

“I'm going for a walk,” he said.

“Okay. Let's talk about this when you get back.”

Here's the confusing part. While a period inside quotation marks changes into a comma, exclamation marks (!) and question marks (?) inside quotation marks stay the same.

For example:

“How did your test go?” her mom asked.

“I totally aced it!” Chrissie shrieked, jumping up and down with excitement.

Exercise #10

Earlier in this workbook, you read about G Child's initiation into the Diablos. The scene was taken from a book called *Inner-city Girl Like Me*. Later in the novel, G Child and two other female gang members are mourning the death of a good friend who has died as a result of violence.

Read through the story and put quotation marks and punctuation in where needed.

Violet and I drove to the cemetery in silence

As we approached the black iron gates, Violet hung back a little. I can't do this she said

Will you be okay? I asked her, knowing that this stress was not good for her pregnancy

I'll do my best

Violet and I stood close to each other. We listened to the priest say his final prayer and prepared ourselves to see our friend lowered into the ground.

Why didn't anyone call me Gina said as she crept up behind us. Violet jumped Nobody knows how to get ahold of you I said, looking into her red and puffy eyes.

I'm around Gina said, choking back tears.

She stared into the distance and slowly put her head down. I'd never seen her look so weak and vulnerable

She looked up at me with no sign of hiding her emotions. Did you think I wasn't going to care she demanded. Did you think I wasn't going to miss her? I know I was wrong.

She held me tight, my face in her long black hair. I hugged her as hard as I could

The priest finished his prayer and the coffin was lowered into the ground All three of us stood near the edge and watched

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Gina take something out of her pocket It was a

picture of us: Jessica, Violet, Gina and me standing outside our apartment. I remember the picture well. It was the first day we moved in. We were surrounded with garbage bags full of our clothes and cardboard boxes full of junk. We looked happy. The excitement of starting this new life of money, power and independence filled us, but most importantly, we were starting it together.

Gina admired the picture and tossed it into the six-foot hole. It landed face-up. The first shovel of dirt hit the picture. It's all gone, I thought, just like Jessica was gone and the dream was gone. It was being buried with her.

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