

LESSON 3

HOW TO TALK ABOUT SCHOOL SPIRIT

"Okay, I'm here, but I refuse to do the wave. First sign of the wave and I bolt."

"Fine, Alex. I don't think anyone even *does* the wave anymore."

We were sitting under a large banner that read "Westerburg Wildcats." Janet was dressed in the Westerburg colors- mustard and violet, a combination even she didn't pull off very well-and was shaking a big foam finger. I was bundled up in an old Boredoms hoodie and trying to sink lower into the bleacher. "It's freezing," I mumbled. "No, it's not, Alex. It's California," she said.

I peered down over the railing into a sea of mustard-and-violet-clad cheerleaders. Tara Mickleson, the head cheerleader, was pulling off a rather remarkable set of cartwheels. When she righted herself, I thought I saw a cloud of hair spray rise off her head. "Amazing! Did you see that? Her ponytail didn't even *budge*."

Janet started to laugh and then socked me on the shoulder. "Be nice! She's really sweet. We're on Winter Ball committee together." Funny, Tara and I were lab partners in the eighth grade. I remember she really had a thing for unicorns back then – every inch of her Trapper Keeper was covered with stickers of them. Sometimes I'm really tempted to ask her what happened to that thing.

"Look, there are your brothers." I followed Janet's hand and saw them standing near the snack shack, surrounded by their usual freshman posse. Janet put two fingers in her mouth and whistled at them. Mike pretended to faint when he saw me in the stands, so I flipped him off and stuck my tongue out. Wayne caught my imaginary finger and stuck it in his back pocket, which made all the girls laugh like they'd never, ever seen anyone do that before.

The game started and Janet got really caught up in it- but not so caught up that she didn't notice when I pulled out my Discman, unfortunately, so I sheepishly stuck it back in my coat. I watched for a while, then got bored and allowed my eyes to wander over the crowd. All the faces in the stands were glowing from the stadium lights. If I tuned out all the noise, it was a really beautiful picture. I was trying to work at the image-maybe it would turn up in my next poem-when all of a sudden my eyes landed on something worth looking at.

"Oh no," I muttered under my breath. "*Hell-o*."

He was sitting alone in the top row, hands jammed in the pockets of his beatup leather coat. His hair was falling in that perfect, I-didn't-mean-to-do-this, indie-rocker flop around his eyes. I looked down and- still my beating heart – he was wearing old -school black Converse sneakers.

Janet noticed that my attention had wandered. She raised an eyebrow.

"Who is that total *fox* over there?" I whispered breathlessly.

"Tell me you didn't just seriously use the word *fox*."

"Shut up, Gonzales. Who is he? Do you know?"

She looked at him again. "New guy, I guess."

He must have noticed the two of us staring like idiots, because at that moment he looked over and smiled-at least I think it was a smile.

Well ... maybe year eighteen was going to be exciting after all.

WORDS ABOUT SCHOOL SPIRIT

Janet told me we had to go to the pep rally to **bolster** the football team.

bolster (v): to strengthen or support something

RELATED WORDS

A very close synonym for bolster is *buttress*. *Buttress* can also be used as a noun: something that supports a larger structure.

Sometimes the **ardor** of football fans scares me.

ardor (n): intense feeling

Here are some synonyms for **ardor**.

fervor (n): extreme emotion or belief (sometimes you'll see this word as *fervency*)

fanaticism (n): extreme enthusiasm or belief

The difference between the two is that a fanatic takes his or her fervor too far; fanaticism usually implies irrationality and a lack of clear thinking.

The stadium was filled with **ebullient** people, screaming and clapping for their team.

ebullient (adj): full of cheerful enthusiasm

My brothers were in a state of **euphoria** at the pep rally; they were so filled with **exuberance** that they gave shouts of **exultation**.

euphoria (n): a feeling of great joy

exuberance (n): cheerful enthusiasm

exultation (n): a feeling of great joy or triumph, or the expression of that feeling

I, however, remained **aloof** during the whole thing. I'm far too dignified to do the wave.

aloof (adj): unwilling to get involved, usually out of a sense of superiority

Janet, however, felt the **compulsion** to whoop it up with the rest of the crowd.

compulsion (n): a force that makes someone do something
I don't see how Janet and I can be such good friends, given my

aversion to school spirit events.

aversion (*n*): strong feeling of dislike

I can't get into all this **frivolity** – really, I have better things to do than yell for a dumb football game.

frivolity (*n*): silly or trivial behavior

I will admit, though-I do like the feeling of **camaraderie** at these things.

camaraderie (*n*): a feeling of closeness among a particular group of people

I like the way it makes our school feel **cohesive**.

cohesive (*adj*): sticking together

My brothers got mad at me for **fraternizing** with someone from the other team, even though I've known him forever from band camp.

fraternize (*v*): to socialize with other people-especially people with whom you shouldn't be friends

I'm not sure what these pep rallies are supposed to **nurture**-camaraderie among your classmates, or fanatic hatred for the opposing team.

nurture (*v*): to encourage something to grow

WORDS ABOUT CHEERLEADERS

One of cheerleaders wears this little Hello Kitty headband that I find really **cloying**.

cloying (*adj*): sickeningly sweet

Cheerleaders have to be incredibly friendly and **effervescent** – it all seems awfully tiring.

effervescent (*adj*): lively, bubbly

RELATED WORDS

A synonym for *effervescent* is **vivacious** (*adj*): lively, high-spirited.

Most cheerleaders are really **gregarious**; it's rare to meet a shy cheerleader.

gregarious (*adj*): friendly, sociable, talkative

If you are too loquacious, you might be **garrulous**.

loquacious (*adj*): friendly, sociable, talkative (a synonym for *gregarious*)

garrulous (*adj*): excessively talkative

Listening to cheerleaders **prattle** on about the game was giving me a headache.

prattle (*v*): to talk in a silly, childish way

Prattle can also be used as a noun: The cheerleaders' constant prattle drove me bonkers.

From way up in the bleachers, the cheerleading squad looked quite **homogenous**: They all had on matching uniforms, and they even had matching hairdos and sneakers.

homogenous (*ad!*): being similar in nature (the prefix *homo* means "alike" or "the same")

The cheerleaders' **conformity** scared me a little. I wonder if they

move, talk, and dress the same way off the field too

conformity (*n*): behavior that completely complies with accepted standards.

The word has a definite negative connotation-it implies dullness and unthinking behavior.

The **incessant**, repetitive cheers were beginning to grind on my nerves.

incessant (*ad!*): nonstop

The loudspeaker was **stridently** broadcasting the cheers across the whole neighborhood.

strident (*ad!*): loud, harsh in tone

The head cheerleader is in math with me. It's amazing that a gin who's so vivacious on the field can be so **vapid** in class.

vapid (*ad!*): dull, lacking interest

I think all that jumping and squealing is really pretty **inane**.

Inane (*adj*): senseless, unimportant

Some synonyms for *inane* are **vacuous** (*adj*): lacking intelligence or content and **fatuous** (*adj*): unintelligent and unaware.

I should probably stop **vilifying** cheerleaders. After all, they're actually *doing* something with their time, right?

vilify (*v*): to say abusive things about someone else

I should just keep all these nasty, **derisive** comments to myself.

derisive (*adj*): showing contempt

WORDS ABOUT THE ATHLETES AND COMPETITION

The football players were quick and **adroit**. There's no way I could ever handle a ball like that.

adroit (*adj*): quick and skillful, either physically or mentally

RELATED WORDS

Two synonyms for *adroit* are **dexterous** (*adj*) and **agile** (*adj*).

Some of the bigger athletes moved **ponderously** across the field, weighed down by all their padding.

ponderously (*adv*): in a lumbering, slow, and heavy manner

Despite his **prodigious** bulk, however, the biggest guy on the field was quite agile.

prodigious (*adj*): great in amount or size

Personally, I prefer brains over **brawn** in a guy.

brawn (*n*): physical strength

Each of the athletes has such a great **physique**. Hmm, maybe I should start jogging again.

physique (*n*): the shape and size of someone's body

One of the quarterbacks was a total **novice**: He was so nervous, I was afraid he was going to throw up in his helmet.

novice (*n*): someone who is new at something

Tonight we were playing our greatest **adversary**, Monte Vista High

School.

adversary (*n*): opponent

A synonym for *adversary* is **antagonist** (*n*). The term comes from literature, where an *antagonist* is a character whose goals, values, or behavior conflict with the **protagonist** (*n*): the main character in a work of literature.

There's a lot of **enmity** between Westerburg and Monte Vista.

enmity (*n*): hatred

I was afraid an **altercation** was going to break out when the referee gave the point to the other team.

altercation (*n*): heated argument

The intense game really **polarized** the two halves of the audience.

polarize (*v*): to make the differences between groups clearer and more extreme

My brothers' admiration for the star quarterback borders on **idolatry**.

idolatry (*n*): fanatical worship of something or somebody

I think he's a **narcissistic** pig: he always acts like he won the game single-handedly and never bothers to give his teammates any credit.

narcissistic (*adj*): excessively self-admiring or self-centered. The term comes from the Greek myth of Narcissus, a beautiful young man who fell in love with his own reflection.