

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Herd Behavior**

By CommonLit Staff

2014

*"Herd behavior" is a term used to describe the tendency of individuals to think and act as a group. As you read, take notes on how herd behavior affects the actions of humans.*

### **Background**

- [1] The term "herd behavior" comes from the behavior of animals in herds, particularly when they are in a dangerous situation such as escaping a predator. All of the animals band closely together in a group and, in panic mode, move together as a unit. It is very unusual for a member of the herd to stray from the movement of the unit.



*"Herd of Goats" by Unknown is in the public domain.*

The term also applies to human behavior, and it usually describes large numbers of people acting the same way at the same time. It often has a connotation<sup>1</sup> of irrationality, as people's actions are driven by emotion rather than by thinking through a situation. Human herd behavior can be observed at large-scale demonstrations, riots, strikes, religious gatherings, sports events, and outbreaks of mob violence. When herd behavior sets in, an individual person's judgment and opinion-forming process shut down as he or she automatically follows the group's movement and behavior.

### **Examples of Herd Behavior**

Herd behavior in humans is frequently observed at times of danger and panic; for example, a fire in a building often causes herd behavior, with people often suspending their individual reasoning and fleeing together in a pack. People in a crisis that requires escape will attempt to move faster than normal, copy the actions of others, interact physically with each other, and ignore alternative strategies in favor of following the mass escape trend.

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1. an idea or quality that a word expresses in addition to its meaning

Another commonly cited example of human herd behavior is the phenomenon of stock market bubbles. Large stock market trends often begin and end with a mass frenzy of buying (bubbles) or selling (crashes). Many observers see these stock market trends as examples of herding behavior because individuals are driven by emotion rather than reason to “join the crowd”; greed drives mass buying frenzies, and fear drives crashes.

## Behavior in Crowds

- [5] A more obvious example of human herd behavior occurs in dense public crowds or mobs. Crowds that gather because of a grievance or protest can involve herding behavior that becomes violent. Psychologists posit <sup>2</sup> that a “group mind” can overtake a mob and embolden people to act in ways they would not individually, increasing the likelihood that situations become violent.

Sporting events can also create herd behavior on a violent scale. The football hooliganism prevalent in Europe in the 1980s is a well-known example of sports-related herding behavior and violence. Overzealous fans of football teams often engaged in unruly or destructive behavior in the name of supporting their team and intimidating the rival team, to the extent that people involved could be badly injured or even killed.

Some historians believe that Adolf Hitler purposefully took advantage of herd behavior psychology by planting a significant number of undercover German officers in the crowds at his speeches. These officers would enthusiastically cheer for Hitler, and the rest of the crowd followed suit, making it seem as if the entire crowd supported Hitler. These speeches would then be broadcast to a larger public audience, magnifying the effect.

## Everyday Decision-Making

Herd behavior does not always have such harmful effects; it can be influential in people’s everyday, simple decisions. For example, suppose that a family is walking down the street looking for a restaurant to have dinner. If they pass a restaurant that is empty and one that is relatively crowded with patrons, they are far more likely to choose the crowded one, on the assumption that it’s better because there are more people there. Herding can be subtle in this way; it simply involves people’s tendency to follow a crowd rather than carve out an individual path in many situations.

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2. **Posit** (*verb*) to propose or assume

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## Nothing Gold Can Stay

By Robert Frost

1923

*Robert Frost (1874-1963) was one of the most popular and critically respected American poets in history. His poems frequently employ rural scenes from the New England countryside. As you read the poem, take notes on the use of imagery in the poem.*

- [1] Nature's first green is gold,  
Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaf's a flower;  
But only so an hour.
- [5] Then leaf subsides to leaf.  
So Eden<sup>1</sup> sank to grief,  
So Dawn goes down to day.  
Nothing gold can stay.



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1. The Garden of Eden is a paradise described in the biblical book of Genesis.

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following best identifies a theme of the poem?
  - A. Love is unpredictable and inconsistent.
  - B. The most beautiful moments of life are brief.
  - C. Perfection and paradise are unattainable.
  - D. It is dangerous to forget that we will all die at some point.
  
2. What does the color "gold" most likely represent in the poem?
  - A. the speaker's greed
  - B. the speaker's dreams
  - C. the slow passage of time
  - D. the fleeting nature of beauty
  
3. Which of the following best presents an example of alliteration in the poem?
  - A. "Her hardest hue to hold." (Line 2)
  - B. "Her early leaf's a flower" (Line 3)
  - C. "Then leaf subsides to leaf." (Line 5)
  - D. "Nothing gold can stay." (Line 8)
  
4. How do lines 6-7 contribute to the development of a theme in the poem?

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## We Real Cool

By Gwendolyn Brooks  
1960

*Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000) was an American poet, author, and teacher. On May 1, 1950, she became the first African American woman to receive the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. In this poem, Brooks describes seeing a group of men in a pool hall and portrays them as not caring about responsibilities.*

***As you read, take note of how Brooks's form contributes to the development of the theme of the poem.***

- [1]                   THE POOL PLAYERS.  
  
                          SEVEN AT THE GOLDEN  
                          SHOVEL.

We real cool. We  
Left school. We

- [5]   Lurk late. We  
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We  
Thin gin. We

- [10] Jazz June. We  
Die soon.



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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following identifies the central theme of the poem?
  - A. A carefree lifestyle can have dire consequences.
  - B. It is important to control the image other people have of you.
  - C. As long as you have a reliable group of friends, nothing else matters.
  - D. Your youth should be a time for fun, not responsibilities.
  
2. PART B: Which quote from the poem best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "The Pool Players. / Seven at the Golden Shovel." (Lines 1-2)
  - B. "Lurk late. We / Strike straight. We" (Lines 5-6)
  - C. "Sing sin. We / Thin gin. We" (Lines 7-8)
  - D. "Jazz June. We / Die soon." (Lines 9-10)
  
3. PART A: How does the tone evolve throughout the poem?
  - A. It remains light-hearted throughout the poem, as the boys don't take their actions or the possible consequences seriously.
  - B. It starts off as light-hearted but becomes serious as the consequences of the boys' carefree lifestyle becomes apparent.
  - C. It goes from being serious about the consequences of the boys' actions to being casual about them.
  - D. It remains consistently somber throughout the poem, as there are clearly consequences for every decision the boys make.
  
4. PART B: Which stanza from the poem best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. We real cool. We / Left school. We (Stanza 1, Lines 3-4)
  - B. Lurk late. We / Strike straight. We (Stanza 2, Lines 5-6)
  - C. Sing sin. We / Thin gin. We (Stanza 3, Lines 7-8)
  - D. Jazz June. We / Die soon. (Stanza 4, Lines 9-10)

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## Popularity

By Adam Bagdasarian

2005

*The short story "Popularity" comes from Adam Bagdasarian's book, First French Kiss: and other traumas. It details the struggles and worries of a teenage boy. As you read, take notes on the advantages and disadvantages of popularity as described in the text.*

- [1] Somewhere inside me I knew that ten-year-old boys were not supposed to spend their recess circling oak trees in search of four-leaf clovers. Still, that's what I and my equally unpopular acquaintances,<sup>1</sup> Allan Gold and Allan Shipman, were doing while the rest of our classmates played tag and kickball and pushed each other higher and higher on the swings.



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Aside from having a little more than our share of baby fat, the two Allans and I had very little in common. In fact, we could barely stand one another. Still, during recess we were the only company we had, so we tried to make the best of it. Now and then one of us would bend forward, pick a clover, examine it, shake his head, and let it fall to the ground.

"Got one," Allan Gold said.

"Let's see," Allan Shipman said.

- [5] Allan showed Allan the clover.

"That's only three."

"No, that's four. Right here. See?"

"That's not a whole leaf," Allan Shipman said sourly. "There's one leaf, two leaves, three leaves."

1. **Acquaintances** (*noun*) people you know or spend time with; not close friends

"Four leafs!"

[10] "That's not a whole leaf!"

We had been looking for four-leaf clovers every school day for six months. And each of us knew exactly what he would do if he ever found one: he would hold the lucky clover tight in his hand, close his eyes, and wish he was so popular that he would never have to spend time with the other two again.

"Got one!" Allan Shipman said.

Allan Gold swiped the clover from him. "One, two, three," he said, throwing it to the ground.

"There's four there! That was a four-leaf clover! Pick it up!"

[15] "You pick it up!"

"You pick it up!"

"You!"

"You!"

While the two Allans faced off, I looked across the black tar and asphalt at a crowd of boys who were making more noise and seemed to be having more fun than anyone else on the playground. These were the popular boys, and in the center of this group stood their leader, Sean Owens.

[20] Sean Owens was the best student in the fourth grade. He was also one of the humblest, <sup>2</sup>handsomest, strongest, fastest, most clear-thinking ten-year-olds that God ever placed on the face of the earth. Sean Owens could run the fifty-yard dash in six seconds, hit a baseball two hundred feet, and throw a football forty yards. The only thing Sean didn't have was personality. He didn't need one. When you can hit a baseball two hundred feet, all you have to do is round the bases and wait for the world's adulation.<sup>3</sup>

I gazed at Sean and the rest of the popular boys in bewildered admiration.<sup>4</sup> It seemed like only yesterday that we had all played kickball, dodgeball, and basketball together; and then one morning I awoke to find that this happy democracy<sup>5</sup> had devolved into a monarchy<sup>6</sup> of kings

2. **Humble** (*adjective*) not bragging or showing off
3. **Adulation** (*noun*) extreme amount of praise
4. **Admiration** (*noun*) a feeling of respect, approval, and appreciation
5. **Democracy** (*noun*) a government where everyone has equal input and power

and queens, dukes and duchesses, lords and ladies. It did not take a genius to know that, upon the continent of this playground, the two Allans and I were stableboys.<sup>7</sup>

I had been resigned to my rank for many months, but now, looking at the two Allans (still arguing over the same three-leaf clover), then at the popular boys, I suddenly knew that I could not stand another day at the bottom. I wanted to be a part of the noise and the laughter; I wanted, I needed, to be popular.

Being ten years old, I did not question this ambition, but I did wonder how on earth I was going to realize it. Though I only stood twenty yards from the heart of the kingdom, I felt a thousand miles removed from the rank and prestige<sup>8</sup> of its citizens. How could I bridge such a gap, knowing I might be stared at, or laughed at, or belittled to a speck so small that I could no longer be seen by the naked eye? And as I stood on that playground, torn between fear and ambition, those twenty yards began to recede from the view, and I knew that I must either step forward now, or retreat<sup>9</sup> forever to a life of bitter<sup>10</sup> companions and three-leaf clovers.

I took a deep breath and then, with great trepidation,<sup>11</sup> crossed the twenty longest yards I had ever walked in my life and found myself standing a few feet from the outer circle of what I hoped was my destiny. I lowered my head a little, so as not to draw attention to myself, and watched and listened.

[25] Mitch Brockman, a lean, long-faced comic, considered by many to be the funniest boy in the fourth grade was in the middle of a story that had something to do with Tijuana and a wiener mobile. I wasn't sure what the story was about, but there was a lot of body English and innuendo, all of which the crowd seemed to find absolutely hilarious.

I noticed that every time Mitch said something funny, he eyed Sean Owens to see if he was laughing. He was. Silently. His mouth was open, but it was the laughter of the other boys that filled the silence. I realized then that Mitch was Sean's jester.<sup>12</sup> As long as he could make Sean laugh, he was assured a prominent position in the group.

I wondered what *my* position in the group might be. I certainly wasn't a great athlete, student, or ladies' man, but I did have a sense of humor. Maybe I could be the *second* funniest boy in the

6. **Monarchy (noun)** a government where one person has all the power; no equal power among the citizens
7. people with the least important status or rank
8. **Prestige (noun)** importance; something with a positive reputation and respect
9. **Retreat (verb)** to move backward; run away
10. **Bitter (adjective)** upset, hurt, or angry due to a sense of unfair treatment
11. **Trepidation (noun)** a feeling of fear or hesitation about what might happen
12. reference to a "court jester," whose job it was to bring entertainment to the king in medieval and Renaissance times

fourth grade. My thoughts went no further because the bell ending recess rang. But that night, just before I fell asleep, I saw myself standing in the center of the popular boys telling the funniest stories anyone had ever heard. I saw Sean Owens doubled up with laughter. I saw myself triumphant.

I returned to the group every recess, for three days. I stood, unnoticed, just outside the outer circle, waiting for my moment, for the one joke or wisecrack<sup>13</sup> that would make me popular. I knew that I would only get one chance to prove myself, and that if I failed, I would be sent back to the stables. And so, with the single-mindedness of a scientist, I listened to the jokes the other boys made, hoping to align my comic sensibilities with theirs. Now and then I found myself on the verge<sup>14</sup> of saying something, but every time I opened my mouth to speak, Mitch would launch<sup>15</sup> into another routine, and my moment passed, and I had to resign myself to yet another day in the dark.

I did not know then that popularity has a life span,<sup>16</sup> and that Mitch's time was about to run out.

- [30] It is a sad fact of life that the clothes a child wears and how he wears them often determine his rank in school society. I knew it, Sean Owens knew it, everyone in school knew it. So maybe it was carelessness, or temporary insanity, or a subconscious desire to step back into the stress-free shadows of anonymity that caused Mitch Brockman to wear a yellow shirt with a yellow pair of pants. He might have gotten away with it if I hadn't left for school that morning unaware that one folded cuff of my jeans was noticeably lower than the other. As it was, the two of us were on a collision course that only one of us would survive.

At recess on that fateful day, I took my customary place a foot from the popular boys (wondering if I would ever get a chance to prove myself) and listened to Mitch tell another variation of his story about the wiener mobile. I pretended to enjoy this story as much as the others, while my mind strayed to a dream world where I did not have to feel so out of place, and Mitch and Sean and I were the best of friends. And then, with a suddenness that jarred<sup>17</sup> me back to reality, Mitch Brockman, a boy who had never noticed me, never seemed to know or care that I was alive, turned to me, pointed at my uneven pants and said, "Someone needs a ruler."

This was, perhaps, the wittiest<sup>18</sup> remark he had ever made, and I froze. With four words he had devastated<sup>19</sup> all my aspirations,<sup>20</sup> defined me as a fool, and all but condemned<sup>21</sup> me to a life of

13. **Wisecrack** (*noun*) a clever or smart joke
14. **Verge** (*noun*) the edge
15. **Launch** (*verb*) to start or begin
16. **Life span** (*noun*) length of time something lives or functions
17. **Jar** (*verb*) to send painful shock or feeling of surprise through
18. **Witty** (*adjective*) funny

shame and obscurity.<sup>22</sup> I could see my future, my boyhood itself, crumbling to dust, and as I heard the laughter and felt the heat of the spotlight upon me, I pointed at Mitch's yellow pants and shirt and said, "Someone else needs a mirror. You look like a canary." Then, with the grace of a magician's assistant, I raised my left arm in a presentational gesture and said, "Boys, I give you Tweety Bird."<sup>23</sup>

And it was all over: As the volume of the laughter doubled, Mitch seemed to vanish, and that day, on that playground, Sean Owens's laughter was heard for the first time. In an instant, Mitch Brockman became Tweety Bird, and I, an absolute nonentity,<sup>24</sup> became somebody. And then somebody special. Someone to seek out. Someone to follow. Sean Owens's first jester and best friend. The entire transformation was complete in a matter of months.

During this time Mitch became a less and less vocal part of the group, telling fewer and fewer stories, until finally, the following year, he was gone — to another school perhaps, or another state, or another country. I never knew. No one knew because no one noticed — no one had called him for months. But *my* phone rang. *My* weekends were filled with sleep-overs and baseball games and bowling parties and bicycle races and more new friends than I knew what to do with.

- [35] And I did not trust one of them, because I knew then that I was standing on sand and was only a yellow shirt and pair of pants away from the oak trees where the two Allans were still looking for four-leaf clovers.

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19. **Devastate** (*verb*) to destroy or ruin
  20. **Aspirations** (*noun*) dreams
  21. **Condemn** (*verb*) to punish
  22. **Obscurity** (*noun*) the state of being unknown
  23. reference to the yellow canary bird from the Looney Tunes cartoons
  24. **Nonentity** (*noun*) an unimportant person or thing

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which of the following statements best expresses a theme of the story?
  - A. Popularity is as temporary as it is motivating for adolescents.
  - B. Being funny is more important to adolescents than being popular.
  - C. Adolescents should wish for more confidence instead of popularity.
  - D. Adolescents often abandon their friends when they gain popularity.
  
2. How does the author develop the narrator's point of view in paragraphs 20-22?
  - A. by showing how cruel the other boys are to the narrator
  - B. by contrasting the narrator's accomplishments to those of Sean Owens
  - C. by describing the daily routine the narrator and the two Allans have at recess
  - D. by comparing the playground to a kingdom where the narrator holds no power
  
3. In paragraph 30, the narrator says, "As it was, the two of us were on a collision course that only one of us would survive." What does the narrator mean when he says only one would "survive"?
  - A. Only one would stay alive.
  - B. Only one would be harmed.
  - C. Only one would be popular.
  - D. Only one would be able to tell a joke.
  
4. Which piece of evidence best shows how the narrator's joke affects his status on the playground?
  - A. "In an instant, Mitch Brockman became Tweety Bird, and I, an absolute nonentity, became somebody." (Paragraph 33)
  - B. "and that day, on that playground, Sean Owens's laughter was heard for the first time." (Paragraph 33)
  - C. "During this time Mitch became a less and less vocal part of the group, telling fewer and fewer stories" (Paragraph 34)
  - D. "I was standing on sand and was only a yellow shirt and pair of pants away from the oak trees where the two Allans were still looking for four-leaf clovers." (Paragraph 35)

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## **Compliance**

By Saul McLeod  
2008

*Compliance is a type of social influence where an individual conforms to a rule. Unlike obedience, there is only a request rather than an order. As you read, take notes on each of the three compliance techniques and why they work.*

- [1] Compliance is a type of social influence where an individual does what someone else wants them to do, following his or her request or suggestion. It is similar to obedience, but there is no order – only a request.

There are many techniques a person can use to ensure compliance:

### **The Foot-in-the-Door Technique**

The foot-in-the-door technique (Freedman & Fraser, 1966) assumes agreeing to a small request increases the likelihood of agreeing to a second, larger request.

So, initially you make a small request and once the person agrees to this they find it more difficult to refuse a bigger one.

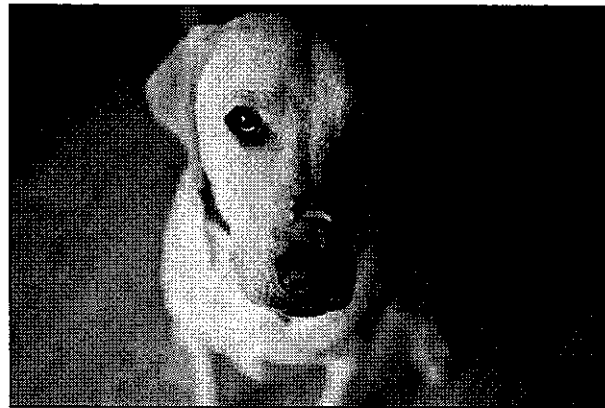
- [5] For example, imagine one of your friends missed the last psychology class and asked to borrow your notes. This is a small request that seems reasonable, so you lend the notes to your friend. A week later, the same friend asks to borrow all of your psychology notes. This is large request – would you agree or not?

The foot-in-the-door technique works on the principle of consistency (Petrova et al, 2007). This means that as long as the request is consistent with or similar in nature to the original small request, the technique will work.

### **The Door-in-the-Face Technique**

Refusing a large request increases the likelihood of agreeing to a second, smaller request.

Initially you make a big request, which a person can be expected to refuse. Then you make a



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smaller request, which the person finds difficult to refuse because they feel they shouldn't always say no. For example, negotiating a pay raise with your boss: First you make a request that will not be met and ask for 20%. When this is refused, you make a more realistic request and ask for 10%.

It has been found the door-in-the-face technique produces high levels of compliance only when the same person makes the request, and the requests are similar in nature. This technique works due to the principle of reciprocity<sup>1</sup> (Cialdini et al, 1975). Saying "no" to a large request may make the person feel they owe the other person who made the request a favor.

## The Low-Ball Technique

- [10] Agreeing to purchase something at a given price increases the likelihood of agreeing to purchase it at a higher price.

Initially you get the individual to agree to your request and then afterwards you increase the original terms, and trick them into agreeing to more than they intended. For example, when buying a car the salesman agrees to a price, but must "check" with his manager if this is acceptable. While you wait, you think you have secured a good deal. The salesman returns and says his manager would not agree to the deal and the price is raised. Most people agree to the higher price.

The success of this technique works on the principle of commitment. Because the person has said "yes" or agreed to an initial request, commitment has been given. When the request changes or becomes unreasonable, the person will (to a degree) find it difficult to say "no" because of having originally committed themselves.

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1. **Reciprocity** (*noun*) a relationship built on cooperation or exchange between two people or groups