

TEACHER'S GUIDE

It Only Takes Seconds – A True Story

Objective:

Demonstrate what can happen when drivers and cyclists don't share the road, follow the rules or control their tempers.

Means:

Read the passage below to students, pose the questions and discuss.

The Story:

When the driver and cyclist began their day, they probably never thought anything so dramatic would ever happen to them. But in their chance encounter, things raged out of control. On that day, everything changed for the worst – one would be dead, and one would be convicted subsequently of first-degree murder and sent to prison for 45 years.

The driver was in his sports utility vehicle on the way to work. As he approached an intersection to turn right, he looked to his left for oncoming traffic then quickly proceeded to make a right turn. Immediately he encountered a cyclist heading in the same direction.

The driver cut off the cyclist, who hit the truck with his hand and cursed the driver. The driver dropped back and began driving behind the cyclist, who weaved to get out of the way. The driver speeded up then bumped the cyclist, who wobbled but stayed upright. The driver hit the cyclist a second time, running him over with the bicycle becoming lodged underneath the SUV. The driver went down the street, pulled into an alley where he was seen pulling the bicycle from beneath his SUV. He then drove off. Back at the scene of the collision, police discovered the SUV's front license plate underneath the body of the dead cyclist.

1. What's the first mistake made in this story?

- A. The cyclist shouldn't have been riding his bicycle in the street.
- B. The driver failed to come to a complete stop and look both left and right to make sure it was safe to proceed before making a right turn.
- C. The cyclist should not have been in the street, but riding on the sidewalk.
- D. The cyclist should have seen the motorist first and moved completely out of his way.

Answer: B, the driver failed to check in both directions to assure it was safe for him to make a safe right turn.

2. What's the next mistake made in the scenario?

- A. When the driver made his turn, he should have honked his horn loudly for the cyclist to get out of his way.
- B. The cyclist should have moved to the sidewalk to avoid the oncoming driver.

C. The driver should have allowed more than three feet of space between him and the cyclist when passing.

D. The driver should have come as close as possible to the cyclist to teach him that the street is for cars and trucks not bicycles.

Answer: C, not seeing the bicyclist caused the motorist to come so close to the bicyclist that he nearly made contact. The safe distance between a vehicle and a bike should have been at least three feet, even more if the vehicle had been traveling at a high speed.

3. What are the next mistakes?

A. The cyclist should not have hit the truck with his hand and cursed the driver.

B. The motorist did not ignore the cyclist's actions and continue on.

C. The driver and the cyclist should have controlled their tempers.

D. All of the above.

Answer: D, all of the above. Although the cyclist understandably felt endangered by the driver's action, he escalated the situation by pounding his fist on the SUV and cursing the driver. The driver further escalated the situation by responding to the cyclist's actions. By not ignoring the other's response, they both contributed to the escalation of the encounter.

4. What were the mistakes that led to the fatality?

A. The driver began harassing the cyclist by driving closely behind the cyclist.

B. The driver accelerated his SUV with the cyclist in front of him..

C. The driver struck the cyclist twice and drove off.

D. All of the above.

(Answer: D, all of the above. The motorist who initiated the situation by driving too close to the cyclist in the first place made the event even graver by being more aggressive, accelerating his SUV, striking the cyclist twice then driving off. Also, when a cyclist responds to an violation of the rules and an attack on his safety, he does not know with whom he's dealing.

Driving a car means more than controlling the vehicle; it also involves controlling your emotions so that road situations, like the one above, do not spin out of control, leading to disastrous consequences.

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