**Excerpt from *Ender’s Game***

The bell rang. Everyone signed off their desks or hurriedly typed in reminders to themselves. Some were dumping lessons or data into their computers at home. A few gathered at the printers while something they wanted to show was printed out. Ender spread his hands over the child-size keyboard near the edge of the desk and wondered what it would feel like to have hands as large as a grown-up's. They must feel so big and awkward, thick stubby fingers and beefy palms. Of course, they had bigger keyboards--but how could their thick fingers draw a fine line, the way Ender could, a thin line so precise that he could make it spiral seventy-nine times from the center to the edge of the desk without the lines ever touching or overlapping. It gave him something to do while the teacher droned on about arithmetic. Arithmetic! Valentine had taught him arithmetic when he was three.

"Are you all right, Andrew?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You'll miss the bus."

Ender nodded and got up. The other kids were gone. They would be waiting, though, the bad ones. His monitor wasn't perched on his neck, hearing what he heard and seeing what he saw. They could say what they liked. They might even hit him now--no one could see them anymore, and so no one would come to Ender's rescue. There were advantages to the monitor, and he would miss them.

It was Stilson, of course. He wasn't bigger than most other kids, but he was bigger than Ender. And he had some others with him. He always did.

"Hey Third."

Don't answer. Nothing to say.

"Hey, Third, we're talkin to you, Third, hey bugger-lover, we're talkin to you."

Can't think of anything to answer. Anything I say will make it worse. So will saying nothing.

"Hey, Third, hey, you flunked out, huh? Thought you were better than us, but you lost your little birdie, Thirdie, got a bandaid on your neck."

"Are you going to let me through?" Ender asked.

"Are we going to let him through? Should we let him through?" They all laughed. "Sure we'll let you through. First we'll let your arm through, then your butt through, then maybe a piece of your knee."

The others chimed in now. "Lost your birdie, Thirdie. Lost your birdie, Thirdie."

Stilson began pushing him with one hand; someone behind him then pushed him toward Stilson.

"See-saw, marjorie daw," somebody said.

"Tennis!"

"Ping-pong!"

This would not have a happy ending. So Ender decided that he'd rather not be the unhappiest at the end. The next time Stilson's arm came out to push him, Ender grabbed at it. He missed.

"Oh, gonna fight me, huh? Gonna fight me, Thirdie?"

The people behind Ender grabbed at him, to hold him.

Ender did not feel like laughing, but he laughed. "You mean it takes this many of you to fight one Third?"

"We're *people,* not *Thirds*. You're about as strong as a fart!"

But they let go of him. And as soon as they did, Ender kicked out high and hard, catching Stilson square in the breastbone. He dropped. It took Ender by surprise--he hadn't thought to put Stilson on the ground with one kick. It didn't occur to him that Stilson didn't take a fight like this seriously, that he wasn't prepared for a truly desperate blow.

For a moment, the others backed away and Stilson lay motionless. They were all wondering if he was dead. Ender, however, was trying to figure out a way to forestall vengeance. To keep them from taking him in a pack tomorrow. I have to win this now, and for all time, or I'll fight it every day and it will get worse and worse.

Ender knew the unspoken rules of manly warfare, even though he was only six. It was forbidden to strike the opponent who lay helpless on the ground; only an animal would do that.

So Ender walked to Stilson's supine body and kicked him again, viciously, in the ribs. Stilson groaned and rolled away from him. Ender walked around him and kicked him again. Stilson could not make a sound; he only doubled up and tears streamed out of his eyes.

Then Ender looked at the others coldly. "You might be having some idea of ganging up on me. You could probably beat me up pretty bad. But just remember what I do to people who try to hurt me. From then on you'd be wondering when I'd get you, and how bad it would be." He kicked Stilson in the face. Blood from his nose spattered the ground nearby. "It wouldn't be this bad," Ender said. "It would be worse."

He turned and walked away. Nobody followed him. He turned a corner into the corridor leading to the bus stop. He could hear the boys behind him saying, "Geez. Look at him. He's wasted." Ender leaned his head against the wall of the corridor and cried until the bus came. I am just like my awful, mean brother. Take my monitor away, and I am just like him.