Dear Educators and Counselors,

The holidays are the perfect time for students to practice flexing their empathy skills. When they consider the injustices faced by other teens, they continue to build their social awareness, an integral social and emotional learning competency. This issue, “Are We Equal Yet?,” tackles the issue of gender equality. The writers challenge gender expectations, expose gender inequities, and explore ways to feel empowered and in control of who they are.

The lesson accompanying Jeimmy Hurtado’s story, “My Leggings Are Too Sexy; His Tank Top Isn’t,” has students work in small groups to suggest ways that their school dress codes, or other school policies, can be fair and equal for anyone on the gender spectrum. Not only do these activities promote critical thinking and cooperative learning, they also encourage students to view this timely issue through a gendered lens. As always, the open-ended questions in this lesson guide can be used with any of our stories.

We extend our deepest gratitude for the work you do and wish you a wonderful and relaxing winter break!

Sincerely,

Jillian Luft
Education Director
ELA Literacy & Social and Emotional Learning

What I Wear Should Be Fair

Story to Use: “My Leggings Are Too Sexy; His Tank Top Isn't,” by Jeimmy Hurtado, p.9

Story Summary: Jeimmy questions the fairness of her school's dress code after she’s punished for a violation. She notices that the schoolwide policy only seems to apply to girls and considers it an example of gender inequity.

Lesson Objectives and Common Core Connections:
- Students make personal connections to a text and successfully participate in story-based activities and discussions.
- Students increase empathy with other youths’ experiences.
- Students increase understanding of gender justice in order to recognize inequities.
- Students will read and comprehend literary nonfiction proficiently (CCLS R.10).
- Students will write routinely over extended and shorter time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences (CCLS W.10).

Before Reading the Story (10 min)
This opening activity will activate background knowledge to boost reading comprehension and set the emotional tone for the story.

1. Welcome students to the group. Introduce the lesson by telling them you will be reading a true story by a teen who challenges her school dress code.

2. Introduce the whole group brainstorming activity by explaining that students will fill out the sticky notes in front of them with as many ideas as they can in two minutes. Show them the t-chart you’ve created with one side labeled “Dress Code for Boys” and the other side labeled “Dress Code for Girls.”

3. Ask group members to label one sticky note: “Dress Code for Boys” and the other “Dress Code for Girls.” Then tell them to write down whatever comes to mind when they think about what a school dress code looks and feels like for boys, and whatever comes to mind when they think about what a school dress code looks and feels like for girls. Tell students this is an anonymous activity; they do not have to put their name on their sticky notes.

4. Before students write, you may model the activity by providing examples of your own responses and placing them on the t-chart.
5. Give students two minutes to write their ideas. They can write as many ideas as will fit on each sticky note. When two minutes are up, ask students to place their sticky notes on the corresponding parts of the t-chart.

6. When all students have placed their sticky notes on the chart, read aloud all the responses from each section.

7. Then facilitate a brief discussion with the following questions:
   - What stands out to you about your classmates’ responses?
   - How are the ideas about dress code for boys and girls similar? How are they different?

**During Reading (20 min.)**

*By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, students build comprehension and support fluency.*

1. Introduce the story (see the story summary above).

2. Share the expectations for a group read-aloud: volunteers take turns reading aloud as much or as little as they would like. As the group leader, you may stop periodically to discuss or check in on active reading by asking students to share their responses to the story.

3. Tell students they will practice an active reading strategy called **reading for a purpose**. This will help them read for a purpose and be prepared to use the text in later activities.

4. **Reading for a purpose** directions: Ask students to read for moments in the text when they connect to the writer’s feelings or experiences. When this occurs in the text, students should place a ♥ in the margins of the story. Then ask them to read for moments when they had questions about the writer’s experiences, or it made them wonder about their own school dress code. When this occurs in the text, students should place a ? in the margins of the story.

5. While sitting in a circle, read the story aloud together. Stop to discuss periodically, supporting peer-to-peer talk and non-judgmental listening. To do this, ask for volunteers to share what they wrote a ♥ and a ? next to and why. Alternately, you can pose an open question such as “What stands out to you in this section and why?”

**After Reading the Story (15 min)**

*During this post-reading activity, students will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.*

1. Introduce the **small group writing** activity by explaining to the group that in small groups, they will be writing and presenting their own speeches to challenge their school dress codes.
2. Ask students to imagine that they have the opportunity to prepare a speech for their school administration about ways their school dress code could be changed to be fair for all students.

3. Have students work in groups of 3-4. Provide them with the following guidelines:

- Draft a speech that outlines specific ways to change the dress code so it addresses “both sexes equally.”
- Explain why these changes are needed.
- Include a hashtag in the speech to get the public to rally around your cause.
- Optional: Describe other unequal, or unfair, policies that you would like to change to bring your school “closer to gender justice.”

4. Give students about 10 minutes to write their speeches.

5. Invite groups to volunteer to give their speeches to the rest of the class. Once groups have presented, you could debrief by asking the following questions:

- What dress code changes that your peers suggested stood out to you?
- What ways seemed most fair to both sexes?
- How do you think your school administration would respond to these changes?
- What do you think would happen if these changes were made? What would change for you and other students?

6. Thank students for being thoughtful members of the group and working to make connections to Jeimmy’s story, reflect on their own lives, and share with one another.
Open-ended questions you can use with any story in YCteen:

1. What main problem or challenge did the writer face?
2. What choices did the teen have in trying to deal with the problem?
3. Which way of dealing with the problem was most effective for the teen? Why?
4. What strengths, skills, or resources did the teen use to address the challenge?
5. If you were in the writer’s shoes what would you have done?
6. What could adults have done better to help this teen?
7. What have you learned from reading this story that you didn’t know before?
8. What connections from your own life, the world, or other text you have read, can you make to this story? This reminds me of…. (text-to-self, text-to-world, text-to-text)
9. What surprised you in this story?
10. Do you have a different view of this issue, or see a different way of dealing with it, after reading this story? Why or why not?

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CONTEST QUESTION #236
Call Out Discrimination
February is Black History Month, a time to reflect on how far we’ve come in our efforts to eliminate racism and discrimination—but we still have a long way to go. What is an example of discrimination that bothers or affects you? Be specific. Then, tell us what could be done to solve the problem.

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Questions? Contact YCteen editor Holly St. Lifer at 212-279-0708 ext. 116 or hstlifer@youthcomm.org

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