Dear Educators and Counselors,

We hope that you’ve begun the calendar year refreshed and in good spirits.

Many of the stories in this issue of YCteen are about mental health. This is an especially timely topic, as New York State is slated to mandate mental health instruction for students in 2018 in response to rising rates of teen suicide and depression.

In this issue, you’ll find stories by teens who write about living with depression or trauma, and how treatments like therapy can help them manage difficult emotions or experiences. Needing help can be difficult for teens to accept because of the stigma that is often attached to mental illness. In “How I Learned to Embrace Therapy,” for example, the author writes, “Growing up, I thought therapy was for people who were crazy or too weak to handle their emotions.”

Aside from stories on mental health, there are other pieces in this issue that we hope will spark meaningful writing and discussion for your students. These include a story that critiques the typical way Black History Month is treated in schools, and a story about a teen who struggles with her social media usage and who winds up leaving the online world behind to focus on “real” friendships.

The lessons included in this guide, designed for use with students, touch on these various topics.

As always, if you have feedback, please let me know via email about your experiences using the lesson guide and how we can improve it. Our goal is that the stories and activities support your important work. Let us know if this is, or isn’t, the case!

Sincerely,

David Heller
Education Director
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WRITING CONTEST
We ask readers to write a letter to one of the writers. This will encourage close reading and writing. (See last page)
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. Before the group begins, write ‘agree’ on a sheet of paper and ‘disagree’ on another. Then post them on opposite walls of the classroom.

2. After welcoming the group, tell them that they will be doing an activity that allows them to move around while learning more about what they and their peers think about a topic.

3. While the group is still seated, review the directions. Tell them:
   - “On either end of the room, there are signs that read ‘agree’ and ‘disagree.’ ”
   - “I will read a statement and you will decide whether it’s true for you (agree) or not (disagree). Then you will move somewhere in between the two signs that reflects your opinion. If you’re unsure, you should stand somewhere in the middle.”
   - “Once everyone has moved, I will invite volunteers to share why they chose to stand where they are.”

4. Clear a space and ask group members to stand somewhere between the two signs.

5. Read the first statement and ask group members to move to a spot between the two signs that reflects their opinion:
   - “Social media use is a problem for young people in my generation.”
6. Once all group members have moved in response to the statement, ask them to notice where other group members are standing. (You can support minority positions by moving closer to someone who is alone at one end of the continuum.)

7. Ask at least one group member standing on either end of the continuum to share why they are standing where they are. Tell group members they may change their position if they are influenced by another group member's opinion.

8. After each question, have everyone return to the middle.

9. Repeat for each statement:
   - “The picture you get of someone from their social media profile is usually a truthful one.”
   - “Social media is good for friendships.”
   - “Communicating face-to-face is better than communicating through social media.”

10. Have everyone return to their seats and thank group members for sharing their opinions.

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 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 identify what stands out for them in the text, or when they have a reaction to something in it. When this occurs, students should write an “*” in the margin.

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 an “*” next to and why. Alternately, you can pose an open question such as “What stands out to you in this section and why?”

6. When you finish the story, ask the group to discuss their reactions to the story. They can turn and talk to a neighbor before you discuss as a whole group.
After Reading the Story (15 min)
During this post-reading activity, students will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

1. Introduce this activity by saying to the group:
   - “Now that we’ve read the story, we’re going to do a Journaling activity about your relationship with social media.”
   - “This is a chance to express your thoughts and feelings without worrying about spelling and grammar.”
   - “There are no right and wrong answers to these questions, just your own ideas.”
   - “If you don’t know what to write or get stuck, just keep your pencil to paper and keep writing the last word you thought of over and over until a new idea comes.”

2. Read the prompt aloud from the chart paper you’ve prepared:
   - What do you or your friends struggle with when it comes to social media use?
   - How do you control your social media use? What works and what doesn’t?
   - What advice would you give you a younger peer or sibling about social media?

3. Pass out journals or notebook paper and pencils.

4. Give group members about 7 minutes to write. Move around the room offering encouragement and support.

5. When 7 minutes are up, tell group members to finish their last thought and put their pencils down.

6. Explain to the group that they are now going to do a Pair Share. Tell them to turn to the person next to them and take turns sharing the parts of their responses that they feel comfortable sharing.

7. Each member of the pair should take about a minute to share. Cue partners to switch roles after the first minute. Use a timer or wait until the hum of conversation dies down before refocusing the group.

8. Lead a discussion by asking group members to describe some of the highlights of their conversations. They can share connections they made with their partners’ writing, new ideas that their partner gave them, or questions they still have about the topic.

9. Thank group members for sharing and listening.
ELA Literacy & Social and Emotional Learning

Not the Whole Story

Story to Use: “There’s More to Black History Than Rosa Parks, MLK, and Malcom X,” by Ria Parker, p.3

Story Summary: The writer is upset with the superficial way that Black History Month is traditionally taught, so she takes it upon herself to learn about lesser-known historical figures and facts. Her new knowledge of African-American history fuels her passion for the subject and her wish to continue studying it in college.

Lesson Objectives and Common Core Connections
- Students make personal connections to a text and successfully participate in story-based activities and discussions.
- Students will respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives (CCLS SL.1).
- 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. Tell them that before reading a story, you are going to do an activity that gets you up and moving, and introduces you to some of your peers’ opinions on topics that will be brought up in the story.

2. Introduce the Concentric Circles activity procedure. Tell the class:
   - “We will form two standing circles, one inside the other.”
   - “Each person will face a partner.”
   - “I will read questions aloud and everyone will have a chance to respond while their partner listens.”

3. Divide the class into two. One way to do this is to have students count off 1-2. (If you don’t have two equal groups, you can join one.)

4. Clear a space in the middle of the room and have the 1s stand and form a circle facing outward.

5. Have the 2s stand and form a second circle around the first one, facing inward.

6. Explain to the class that the person they’re facing will be their first partner.
7. Tell them:
   - “Partners will take turns responding to a question that I ask.”
   - “When one person speaks, the other listens.”
   - “Each person should speak for about one minute. Make sure both of you get a chance to talk.”
   - “When time is up, I will ask one circle to rotate and everyone will have a new partner.”

8. Pose this question to the class:
   - Why do you think there is such a thing as ‘Black History Month?’

9. After two minutes are up (you might want to use a timer to keep track), ask the inside circle to move two people to the right while the outside circle stands still. There should be new pairs formed.

10. Repeat the process using these other questions:
    - Who or what do you typically learn about during Black History Month?
    - In general, do you think your teachers do a good job of covering this topic? Why or why not?
    - What about Black History would you like to learn more about?

11. Have everyone return to their seats.

12. Time permitting, lead a discussion by asking students to describe some of the good points that were made during their conversations. They can also share times they agreed or disagreed with their partner, new ideas that their partner gave them, or questions they still have about the topic.

13. Thank students for sharing.

**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 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 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 the writer states something they agree or disagree with. When they agree with something in the text, they should write a “+” in the margin. When they disagree, they should write a “−” in the margin.
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 “+” or “−” next to and why. Alternately, you can pose an open question such as “What stands out to you in this section and why?”

6. When you finish the story, ask the group to discuss their reactions to the story. They can turn and talk to a neighbor before you discuss as a whole group.

**After Reading the Story** (15 min)
*During this post-reading activity, students will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.*

1. Introduce the Silent Conversation activity by explaining to the group that they will do an activity where they learn more about each other and find ways to connect.

2. Review the directions with the group. Tell them:
   - “Everyone will sit with a partner.”
   - “You will write independently in response to a prompt. Try to end with a question.”
   - “Then you will exchange papers and respond to your partner’s writing by answering their questions, sharing your own ideas, and by posing a new question.”
   - “You will pass notes back and forth to build a silent, written conversation with your partner.”

3. Have group members find a partner and sit beside each other.

4. Pass out journals or notebook paper and pencils.

5. Read the prompt aloud (or write it where students can see):
   - **The writer says,** “If schools teach predominately white history and black history is mostly about slavery and black oppression, black children will grow up thinking their race has nothing good to offer when that isn’t true at all.”
   - What do you think of this idea? Do you agree that it’s important to learn about other lesser-known parts of black history? Why or why not?
   - What would you recommend your teachers do to fix this situation?

6. Have everyone quietly write for one or two minutes. Then, ask partners to pass their notes and respond to each other’s writing. Move around the room to quietly check-in with group members and offer support.

7. Continue this process by directing partners to finish writing and pass their notes about every two minutes. Remind them to include questions that engage their partner and contribute to the conversation.
8. After about 10 minutes of silent conversation, ask group members to finish their last thoughts on paper. Then ask them to share with the whole group some of the highlights from their silent conversation. They can share points of agreement or disagreement, new ideas, or questions.

9. Thank students for being thoughtful members of the group and working to make connections to the writer's story, reflect on their own lives, and share with one another.
Social and Emotional Learning

The Long Road to Recovery


Story Summary: The writer is sexually assaulted by her friend, and she keeps it a secret for months until a failed suicide attempt prompts her to write about the experience. After showing her writing to an English teacher and guidance counselor, she gains the courage to tell her mother. Opening up helps her to rebuild her confidence and love herself again.

Goals for SEL Growth
- Students make personal connections to a text and successfully participate in story-based activities and discussions.
- Students reflect on self-management strategies that can help them cope with difficult emotions.
- Students reflect on the people in their lives they can turn to for support.
- Students identify the pros and cons of keeping secrets that may affect their emotional and academic well-being.

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. Lead a group check-in. If you do not have a routine check-in procedure, ask group members to rate how they’re feeling from 1-10, with 10 being the best they’ve ever felt. Students can elaborate on their number if they’d like.

2. Introduce today’s group by telling them you will be reading a true story by a teen who slowly heals from a traumatic experience.

3. Introduce the Toss One, Take One activity by explaining they are going to do an activity that gathers everyone’s ideas and allows them to hear multiple perspectives.

4. Pass out pieces of scrap paper and pencils. Tell group members not to write their name on their paper. This is an anonymous activity.

5. Ask group members to write a response on their paper to this question:
   - Why can it be hard to open up and share something that’s bugging you?

6. Give group members three minutes to think and then write their responses. If some group members are struggling, ask them to write about why they find it difficult to answer the prompts.

7. Write your own responses to the prompts to model the activity.
8. After group members have written their responses, tell them to crumple them into balls and toss them into the middle of the circle, or a container you have available.

9. Model for the group how you expect them to crumple and toss their responses into the center of the circle.

10. After everyone has tossed, each group member should retrieve an anonymous response from and return to their seats. As an alternative, walk around the circle with the responses and have each group member blindly pick a paper ball. (If a group member happens to choose their own response, it’s OK because no one will know.)

11. Go around in a circle or ask for volunteers to read aloud the response from the paper.

12. Invite group members to comment on what they heard, such as similarities, differences, or personal connections to their peers' responses.

13. Thank group members for sharing.

**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 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 ask students to share their responses to the story.

3. While sitting in a circle, read the story aloud together. Consider asking these open-ended questions during or after the read aloud:
   - What’s standing out to you about the story?
   - What do you think of the writer’s choice to use writing as a way to heal? What are some ways that you can cope with difficult feelings? [writing, meditating, walking/exercise, music, etc.]
   - What advice would you give the writer if you were her friend?

4. Thank the group for reading and sharing.
**Closing Circle** (15 min)
*During this post-reading activity, students will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.*

1. Pose the following questions to the group and take responses from volunteers:
   - How was the writer affected by not sharing her experience of being sexually assaulted for so long?
   - What do you think of her decision to share her writing with an English teacher?
   - Who is someone in your life, like the writer’s English teacher, who you can trust to open up with and discuss something that you want to keep confidential? [note: you can take a thumbs’ up from each group member when they’ve thought of someone rather than take public responses if no one wants to share].

2. Thank students for being thoughtful members of the group and working to make connections to the writer’s story, reflect on their own lives, and share with one another.

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**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?
Do you have a strong feeling about an article you read in the current issue of YCteen? We’d like to hear about it.

YCteen is written by a staff of teen writers who work in our New York City newsroom. But writing is a form of conversation, and we want you to join in.

We invite you to submit an letter in the form of a letter to the writer, responding to their story. This is an opportunity to express your opinion or present your own point of view on a story you’ve read.

Start your letter with “Dear [writer’s name]” and reference the article by the title. End it with “Sincerely” and your name, address, high school, and age.

Here are some prompts to inspire you:

- What stood out to you about the story you chose?
- Can you relate to what the writer experienced? How is your own experience similar, or different?
- If you disagree with the writer, explain why you think differently or how you might have handled the situation.
- Did the story change your opinion or influence your actions?
- Are there aspects that the writer has not considered?

CONTEST RULES:
- You must be between the ages of 14 and 19.
- Letters should be no more than 300 words.
- If you win, your letter will be published on our website and in our print issue. Tell us if you want it to be printed anonymously—but you should still type in your full name and complete address so we know where to mail your check if you win.
- Current YCteen or Represent writers may not enter the letter contest.
- Letters may be edited by Youth Communication editors for brevity and clarity. All entries become property of Youth Communication.

Enter online: bit.ly/yctcontest

Deadline: February 20, 2018

$150 First Prize
$75 SECOND PRIZE | $50 THIRD PRIZE