Dear Educators and Counselors,

Young people are growing up in a world that has a lot to say about how they should look and act as a boy or a girl. Whether it’s from advertisements they see online, or stories they’re told by relatives and friends, maturing children can be steered into confining gender boxes that limit how they behave and present themselves. Too many young people who wind up not fitting neatly into these boxes face exclusion and ostracism.

In this issue of YCteen, you’ll find several stories that focus on this important topic. In “How I Found My Gender Identity,” for example, J.P. writes about the experience of growing comfortable with their identity as a gender non-conformer after facing rejection from their family. We hope that reading this story and others like it with your students will catalyze important dialogue that helps you ensure all students, regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation, are accepted as equals into your school community.

This issue of YCteen also features stories about homelessness, incarceration, and a reported piece on the lingering effects of Hurricane Maria on the people of Puerto Rico. Three of the stories in this issue have accompanying lessons, which are designed to actively engage your students in reading, writing, and discussion on topics that are relevant to their lives.

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.

Sincerely,

David Heller
Education Director
dheller@youthcomm.org

WRITING CONTEST FOR STUDENTS

Write a letter to one of the writers about their story. Alternatively, for this issue only, write a letter about the activism of teens in response to the Florida high school shooting. What does it mean to you? This will encourage close reading and writing. (See last page.)
Story to Use: “Discovering Myself Beyond the Binary,” by Andrew N., p. 3

Story Summary: Andrew always felt different and unaccepted because of their gender identity and sexuality. Starting in middle school, they’re teased because of the fact that they don’t fit neatly into stereotypes of who or what boys should be or like. But after finding some accepting friends who don’t question their lifestyle, and spaces in the internet where they can learn about others like them, Andrew gains confidence and self-esteem.

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. Before the group begins, draw a T-chart on a whiteboard or piece of chart paper with “male” written above one column and “female” written above the other.

2. After welcoming the group, tell them that they will be doing a brainstorming activity that allows them to learn more about what they and their peers think about a topic.

3. When the group settles, review the directions. Tell them:
   - “I am going to read out to you a number of items one by one. As a group, it will be our job to decide if each item tends to be associated with being male or female. I will then write what we decide in the appropriate column.”

4. Read the first item and ask group members to explain why they think it belongs in the “male” or “female” column:
   - “A basketball”

5. Write down the item name in the appropriate place. (If the group has a difficult time categorizing an item, you can let them compromise by writing half of the name in one box and half in the other, by writing the item next to the T-chart itself, or some other solution that you come up with.)
6. Once the group has decided (it can be majority rules) on the item, repeat steps four and five for the following items:
   a. “Yoga mat”
   b. “Dumbbell (3 lbs or less)”
   c. “Video game”
   d. “Pink T-shirt”
   e. “Hair gel”
   f. “Skinny jeans”
   g. “Yankees baseball cap”
   h. “Cell phone”
   i. “Math textbook”

7. After all objects have been categorized or otherwise dealt with, explain that this T-chart represents what is called the “gender binary,” the idea that there are only two genders: male/female, and that a person must fall neatly into one category or the other.

8. Facilitate a discussion using the following questions:
   • “Was this easy or difficult to do? Why?”
   • “What did we do with the items that didn’t fit into the boxes? If these items were people, how do you think they might feel?”
   • “Aside from objects, what else does our society sort into male and female categories?”
   • “What is gained or lost by separating things this way?”
   • “Are there limitations to thinking in terms of a gender binary? What do you think is a better way of thinking about gender?”

9. 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 times when the story raises a question for them. When this occurs, students 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 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, including the questions it raised for them. 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 acceptance. We see that being accepted for who they are is really important for Andrew’s sense of self-esteem and confidence.”
   - “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 prompts aloud from the chart paper you’ve prepared:
   - **If you were to meet someone like Andrew who didn’t fit neatly within the gender binary, what are some things that you could do or say to show that you accept them?**
   - **Even if you don’t fully understand them, how can you be their ally and not their troll?**

3. Pass out journals or notebook paper and pencils.

4. Give group members about 5-6 minutes to write. Move around the room offering encouragement and support.

5. When 5-6 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 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.
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 allows you to do some anonymous writing on a topic related to a story you’ll be reading together.

2. 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.

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

4. Ask group members to write a response on their paper to this question:
   - “What are some ways your culture or family expects you to act because you are a boy or a girl?”

5. 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.

6. Write your own responses to the prompts to model the activity.
7. 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.

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

9. 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.)

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

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

12. 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 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 mentions a gender-based expectation her family has of her and the ways she fights back or resists these expectations. When the writer mentions an expectation her family has of her because she’s a girl, write a “-” in the margin. When she writes about ways she resists these expectations, 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):
   - Winnie says, “[M]y grandmother was just passing along these traditional misogynistic Chinese values without realizing they are oppressive.”
   - What’s a value or belief passed down as a tradition in your family that you like?
   - What’s a value or belief passed down as a tradition in your family you’d like to change? How could you change it?

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.
ELA Literacy & Social and Emotional Learning

Being Teammates On and Off the Field


Story Summary: While casually shooting hoops on the court one afternoon, the writer’s friend is bullied by an older boy. Instead of standing up for his friend and risk getting beaten up, the writer does nothing. This event causes the writer to reflect on what it means to be a good friend and teammate.

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:
   - “What does it mean to be a ‘good friend?’ ”

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:
    - “Is there a difference between being a good friend and being a good teammate? Why or why not?”
    - “Why can it be hard to stand up for someone who’s getting bullied?”
    - “If you see someone being bullied, when (if ever) do you have a responsibility to step in and do something?”

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 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 when they have a connection to something in the story, or when they have a question. When they have a connection, students should write a “C” in the margin. When they have a question, students 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 an “C” 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 this activity by saying to the group:
   - “Now that we’ve read the story, we’re going to do a Role Playing activity connected to the situation that Toyloy wrote about.”
   - “First, we’ll brainstorm some of the options that were available to Toyloy, and then you will act them out in small groups.”

2. Read the prompt aloud, or write it on a piece of chart paper (or on the white board):
   - **What are some of the things that Toyloy could have done or said while Tommy was getting bullied (or after the incident) that would have showed he was a good friend?**

3. Ask for students to brainstorm ideas as a group. Record what’s shared on the chart paper or on a white board. [Some potential ideas: Tell an adult what’s going on, Tell the bully to “Knock it Off” or “Stop,” Distract the bully, Reach out to Tommy afterwards to check in on how he’s doing and show him that you care, etc.]

4. After you have a list of 4-5 ideas, break students up into groups of 3. (Join a group if there’s an even number of students.)

5. Explain that each person will have a specific role:
   - Tommy: the victim
   - Toyloy: the witness (and potential ally)
   - The bully

6. Give groups 5 minutes to select one of the ideas brainstormed by the whole group (or one that they’ve thought of on their own) and plan how they’d role play it in front of the group.

7. Ask small groups to perform their role play for the whole group. Remind the audience to support actors by listening. If the actors get stuck, ask audience members for suggestions the actors can try.
8. After all groups have performed, debrief by asking the whole group the following questions:
   - “What are some of the things that we saw Toyloy do that showed he was being a good friend?”
   - “How do you show others that you’re a good friend?”

9. Thank group members for performing, supporting, and sharing.

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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?
$150 First Prize
$75 Second Prize | $50 Third Prize
Deadline: April 24, 2018

Enter online:
bit.ly/yctcontest

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 a 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.

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.

What Do You Think About the Florida Teen Activists?

After the Valentine’s Day shooting at a Florida high school left 17 people dead, many survivors have become public activists for nationwide changes on gun control. Students are passionately speaking out to local and national leaders about making schools safer for everyone by restricting access to guns. Together, they have formed the #NeverAgain movement to challenge the NRA’s opposition to gun control laws. For this issue’s Writing Contest, in addition to your letters to our writers, we are accepting letters in which you tell us what these students’ actions mean to you. Are you inspired by the power of youth voices? Do you agree with the Florida high school students that gun access should be restricted? Tell us—and make your voice heard!