

For Staff: Group Activities for Youth

Life Tetris

Read the Story: 10 minutes

As a group, read "Building a Better Life" by Anonymous on p. 5. Go around the room, taking turns reading aloud. (Let group members pass if they want to.)

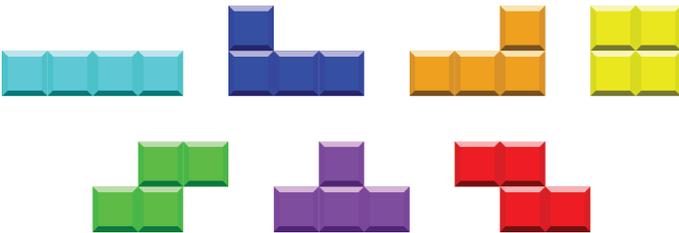
Discussion: 15 minutes

Ask the group to identify places where the author does things that help him create a self and a life that he wants (taking the PSAT; helping the girl who was hurt; doing his homework late at the library; playing basketball; not lying; treating Angel the bully with kindness; excelling in school; getting his working papers).

Now go back to those actions and mark which ones were not supported or encouraged by adults (the first five) and which ones were (the last three, by Marta Reyes). Ask them: What was the difference between right actions the author took despite the adults in his life and ones he took because his foster mother encouraged him? Which made it easier for the author to build on and why? Ask if anyone can share a time that a supportive adult helped them do something that made their life better.

Tetris Activity: 20 minutes

Distribute pieces of paper cut and colored like Tetris pieces.



Have them label each Tetris piece with something they think is important to their life. It could be a quality, an aspect of their life, a relationship, an achievement, anything they want. Then ask them to fit them together in a way that makes sense. For example, if they love swimming and want a job as a lifeguard, those two might go next to each other. Ask everyone to share their Tetris rows and for two of the pieces, name something or someone that helps that piece drop down into their lives.

What Family Means: Not the TV Version

Read the Story: 10 minutes

As a group, read "At 16, I'm Learning What Family Means" by Selena Garcia on p. 27. Go around the room, taking turns reading aloud. (Let group members pass if they want to.)

Discussion: 15 minutes

Ask each teen to mark things Selena imagined about good families when she was living under abusive conditions (happy and united, playing games, eating dinner together, able to get through anything, would encourage her and her brother in school, someone who would wipe her tears and say "I'm here for you.")

Then have them mark parts of the story where Selena actually experiences a good family, with the Garcias ("We're your family now"; Gigi helping her fix her clothes up because Selena is her sister; Jenny explaining why it's smarter not to fight; Selena realizing she has to behave better because she's connected to people; making up with her sister).

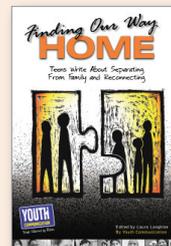
Ask them if they can see a difference between the fantasies based on TV and the realities (in real life, people often fight and disagree and feel lousy before they work it out).

Writing Activity: 20 minutes

Have everyone write a short true scene of a family working together in a way that's real and difficult, as opposed to TV-perfect. Suggest that it be something that surprised them, that at first they thought was going to divide people or even blow the family up, but ended up making them closer. It can be from their own family or foster family or from another family they know. Ask volunteers to share their scenes. ■

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