

Y'All R Real Ones: Middle School Moments

**Discussion Guide for professionals working with 10-14 year olds
in school or during out-of-school time**



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Why This Film?

This 10-minute documentary features early adolescents sharing authentic feelings and perspectives and can be used to engage students in meaningful and inclusive conversation. As students discuss what they see in the film, they may reflect on their own experiences and opinions. While they may not verbalize all of these thoughts, the shared experience of watching and discussing the film may foster a sense of belonging by helping students feel seen and heard.

Note: The school featured is a small public school in New York City that mixes 5th – 8th graders in almost all their classes. The school your students attend may be different from the one in the film and this will provide a rich variety of topics to discuss.

Tips for Viewing

Watch the film before showing it to students. There is a lot happening that young adolescents will notice. Discussion about this film can occur within one class session or over several class sessions.

During discussion with students:

- Follow the students' lead.
- Talk about the students in the film.
- Don't rush the conversation.
- Don't worry if students don't share specifically about themselves. Watching the film together and asking a few questions are good first steps.
- Pay attention to which students they relate to most in the film—this may be a clue to what your students are feeling but not talking about.
- Do more listening than talking.

Part 1 – Discussion Questions

Introduce the film

Tell students they will watch a 10-minute film shown in two pieces. Ask them to think about the students and the school in the film, and to make notes as they watch.

Write these questions on the board

"How do the students in the film compare with people you know?"

"How does the school in the film compare with your own?"

Watch first 6 minutes (only)

Play the film and STOP at 6 min 16 seconds (girl and boy are pushing each other at computer cart). Watching just 6 minutes will solicit deeper conversation.

Reflective response

Give students time to think or write about the questions on the board.

Small group discussion

Break the class into smaller groups. Hand out the student discussion sheet (see last page of this guide) to each group. Ask groups to respond to each question and discuss what they saw in the film that supports their response. If time is limited, pre-select a smaller set of questions.

Topic 1: The Middle School Experience

- A. In what ways is the school in the film like your school? In what ways is it different?
- B. How does the school look and feel?
- C. How do students interact with each other?
- D. How would you describe this school?
- E. Is this a school you would want to attend? Why or why not?
- F. How do you think students feel about this school?

Topic 2: Friendship

- A. How are the friendships in the film the same or different from friendships at your school?
- B. How do kids your age make friends?
- C. Is it possible to be in more than one friend group?
- D. What causes people to change friend groups?
- E. How common are romantic interests in your school?
- F. Is there social drama or conflict at your school? If so, how do students manage it?
- G. Is there bullying at your school? If so, how do students manage it?
- H. What can adults at your school do to support positive friendships?

Part 2 – Discussion Questions

Tell students they will watch the last 4 minutes of the film. Remind them to make notes as they watch.

Watch last 4 minutes

Play final 4 minutes of the film (begin at 6min 16 sec, teacher asking about “swapping” brains).

Reflective response

Give students time to think or write about the questions on the board.

Small group discussion

Break the class into small groups. Hand out the student discussion sheet (see last page of this guide) to each group. Ask groups to respond to each question and discuss what they saw in the film that supports their response. If time is limited, pre-select a smaller set of questions.

Topic 3: Identity

- A. How would you respond to the teacher’s question “Supposing I took Uma’s brain out of her head and I put it in Philip’s body. Who would it be?”
- B. What makes you who you are?
- C. How have you changed since last school year, or the year before that?

Topic 4: Choices

- A. Are students in the film held accountable for their academic and personal choices?
- B. What kinds of choices did students in the film face?
- C. What kind of choices do students your age face?
- D. What do you think about sharing homework? Is it cheating?
- E. What did you notice about school rules and expectations in the film?
- F. What did the teacher mean when he said “The morals of the friendship are always going to trump the morals of the classroom?” Do you agree?

Whole class discussion

Bring students together. Ask each small group to share one answer to the questions on the board.

Alternative Activities

Below are two suggested activities that can be used in conjunction with the film.

Activity #1

Copy or project the diagram onto the board. Ask students to copy it on their own paper or device.



| 1 Rarely happens | 2 Happens sometimes | 3 Happens a lot | 4 Happens all the time |
|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| | | | |

| 1 Not important | 2 Somewhat Important | 3 Very Important | 4 Extremely Important |
|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| | | | |

- Divide students into small groups or pairs.
- Ask students to list the issues that arise in the film.
- Ask each student to individually rate each issue for:
 - a. How often it happens
 - b. Whether or not it is important to them
- Ask small groups to discuss which issues arise most often, and which they feel are most important.
- Reconvene as a full class and discuss which issues are most common and which are most important.

Activity #2

Copy or project the diagram onto the board. Ask students to copy it on their own paper or device.



| 1 Never | 2 Rarely | 3 Sometimes | 4 Always |
|------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | | | |

Read one statement and ask students to rate that statement on their paper (i.e., read statement “A” and have students write on their own paper “A2” or “A4”). Repeat for each statement.

- A. Adults can do things to help students with their friendships.
- B. Changing friend groups is easy.
- C. It doesn’t matter if you cheat.
- D. It’s risky to be too nice.
- E. It’s better to be older.
- F. It’s better to be younger.
- G. School should be fun.
- H. People judge you by how you look.

Discuss as a class. Read each statement and ask for a show of hands for how many rated that statement: never (show of hands), rarely (show of hands), sometimes (show of hands), or always (show of hands). Invite individuals to share their thoughts and why they rated statements as they did.

Student Hand Out for Small Group Discussions

Part 1 - Discussion Questions

Topic 1: The Middle School Experience

1. In what ways is the school like your school? In what ways is it different?
2. How does the school look and feel?
3. How are students interacting with each other?
4. What do you notice that students are required to do?
5. How would you describe this school?
6. Is this a type of school you would want to attend? Why or why not?
7. How do you think students feel about this school?

Topic 2: Friendship

1. How are the friendships in the film the same or different from friendships at your school?
2. How do kids your age make friends?
3. Is it possible to be in more than one friend group?
4. What causes people to change friend groups?
5. How common are romantic interests in your school?
6. Is there social drama or conflict at your school? If so, how do students manage it?
7. Is there bullying at your school? If so, how do students manage it?
8. What can adults at your school do to support positive friendships?

Part 2 - Discussion Questions

Topic 3: Identity

1. How would you respond to the teacher's question "Supposing I took Uma's brain out of her head and I put it in Philip's body. Who would it be?"
2. How have you changed since last school year, or the year before that?

Topic 4: Choices

1. Are students in the film held accountable for their academic and personal choices?
2. What kinds of choices did students in the film face?
3. What kind of choices do students your age face?
4. What do you think about sharing homework? Is this ok to do? Is it cheating?
5. What did you notice about school rules and expectations in the film?
6. What did the teacher mean when he said "The morals of the friendship are always going to trump the morals of the classroom?"

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A documentary short created as part of the Changing By The Minute documentary tool kit, providing an asset-based view of early adolescence. These resources are intended to help professionals, students, and families think optimistically and creatively about the middle school years with the hope of alleviating some of the stress and distress experienced by early adolescents.

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Organizations Using These Materials



SCHOOL of EDUCATION
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YOUTH-NEX



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