

Changing By The Minute

Discussion Guide for Using the 62min film with 10-14 year olds In School or During Out-Of-School Time



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Why This Film?

This 62-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 & Discussion

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.

General Discussion By Sections of the Film

Have students watch the entire film in one session or show the film in sections (times listed below). Ask students to respond to each question with evidence from the film.

Before Viewing

Write / project these questions on the board. Ask students to consider these as they watch.

- “How does the school in the film compare with your own?”
- “How do the students in the film compare with students you know?”
- “How do the adults in the film compare with adults you know?”

Section 1: The School (opening through 12:11)

(Synopsis: Students create individual schedules, students work in mixed grade groups Science of Death class, students comment on working in mixed grade groups, teachers discuss teaching multiple subjects.)

Possible Discussion Topics:

- Physical environment
- Scheduling

- Unstructured times (class transitions, recess, before/after school)
- Student grouping (mixed grade, multiage, interest-based)
- Teacher-student relationships
- Classes
- Academic expectations
- Behavioral expectations

Questions:

- How would you describe this school?
- How does it compare with your own school?
- What did you notice about the physical school building / environment?
- Does the physical environment of your school impact your learning?
- What did you notice about the schedule?
- What did you notice about time between classes? Describe your school day.
- How are students grouped at the school in the film?
- How do teachers interact with students? How do your teachers interact with you?
- How would you like teachers to interact with you?
- What are your thoughts on the types of classes at this school?
- What are your thoughts on the way these classes are taught?
- How are these classes and the way they are taught similar to and/or different from your classes?
- Is the school in the film welcoming? Inclusive? If yes, how? If no, why not?
- How do you think students feel about this school?
- Is this a school you would want to attend? Why or why not?
- What do you think about the school rules and expectations in the film? What are the rules and expectations at your school?

Section 2: Friendship (4 mins long, begin 12:11 – end 16:09)

(Synopsis: Students discuss making and keeping friends, friend groups, and social drama.)

Possible Discussion Topics:

- Friendships
- Peer relations
- Social emotional learning
- Choices

Questions:

- What stands out to you about the student experiences highlighted in this film?
- How are friendships in the film the same or different from your friendships at school?

- How do students interact with each other in the film?
- How do kids your age make friends?
- Is it possible to be in more than one friend group?
- What causes people to change friend groups?
- How common are romantic interests in your school?
- Is there social drama / conflict at your school? If so, how do students manage it?
- Is there bullying at your school? If so, how do students manage it?
- What can adults at your school do to support positive friendships? What topics do you wish you could talk to an adult at your school about?
- Does your school offer advisory? If so, what topics are part of advisory? If not, would you want your school to offer an advisory? Why or why not?

Section 3: Identity (15 mins long, begin 16:09 – end 31:41)

(Synopsis: Students discuss the Odyssey in Latin Class, student wears camouflage to Bird Science, principal discusses giving students space to “be whoever they are,” Science of Death class discusses brain exchange, students and parents discuss the role of Theater Arts, students complete Self Assessments.)

Possible Discussion Topics:

- Early adolescence, developmental domains (e.g., Physical, Intellectual, Moral, Psychological, Social-emotional)
- Social and cultural identities (e.g., Gender Identity, Race/Ethnicity, Sexual Orientation, Class, Religion, Disability, Neurodiversity, Citizenship Status, Grade, History of Academic Achievement)
- Self-expression and self-definition (e.g., Clothing, Outside Interests, Activities, Hobbies)

Questions:

- In the film, a teacher asks students “What makes you YOU?” How did the students respond? How would you respond?
- 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?”
- How have you changed since last school year, or the year before that?
- How important is self-expression and self-definition to you?
- Rank the following social and cultural identities in order of that which you believe carries greatest privilege to least privilege in your school. (1=greatest, 9=least). Justify your rankings.
 - Gender Identity
 - Race/Ethnicity
 - Sexual Orientation
 - Class
 - Religion
 - Disability

- Learning Challenges
- Citizenship Status
- Grade
- History of Academic Achievement
- How do teachers provide opportunities for you to explore who you are, who you want to be and do not want to be, and allow you to express your identity?
- How do your teachers help you with the following social-emotional skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making?
- In the film, a student reads from a letter to families about the upcoming family conference night. The letter says: “Our main objective is for the students to learn that learning is their responsibility.” What does this mean? Do you agree? Why or why not?

Section 4: Choices (15 mins long, begin 31:41 – end 46:29)

(Synopsis: Teachers discuss frequent schedule changes and the need for flexibility, students play dodgeball, students attend a bake sale, students discuss common mistakes made by middle schoolers, students get in trouble, teacher comments on the morals of friendship vs. morals of the classroom, students write anti-valentine Valentines and decorate for the Valentine’s Day party.)

Possible Discussion Topics:

- Choices
- Social Norms, Expectations, Impulses
- Romantic Interests
- Self-expression

Questions:

- In the film students comment on frequent changes to the schedule “It’s all just about changing and being ready to change.” How do you handle changes in your life?
- What choices do students your age face?
- What choices (positive and negative) do students make in the film?
- In what ways do peers influence the choices other middle school students make? At your school, what role do peers play in influencing the choices you make?
- What do you think about sharing homework? Is it cheating?
- 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?
- What did you notice about romantic interests in the film? Do romantic partners influence the choices you make?
- What might be the purpose of the anti-valentine Valentines?
- How important is it be able to have self-expression in school?

Section 5: Community (16 mins long, begin 46:29 – end film)

(Synopsis: Students participate in Facing History class, parent comments on her son's diverse friends and "a level of acceptance that is hard to find in world," students reflect on a friend's pronoun change, students participate in a People Hunt, two girls discuss a disagreement they had over social media, 5th grade Huck succeeds in math, two girls discuss a friend who takes pills, the principal comments on the mix of pains adolescents go through, school year comes to a close, students discuss moving up and moving on.)

Possible Discussion Topics:

- School community
- Diversity of Peer Groups
- Gender Identity
- Sexual Preference
- Social media
- Acceptance and inclusivity
- Desire to learn and knowing how to learn
- Student responsibility for learning

Questions:

- What is school community?
- What stands out to you about the school community at The Center School?
- How do your teachers teach about community? Inclusivity? Responsibility for others?
- What did you notice about diversity of friendships and peer groups in the film? Describe the peer groups at your school.
- Two girls in the film discuss their friend changing pronouns. What did you notice about that conversation?
- What traditions does your school have? Do they help you feel part of the school community? Why or why not?
- What did you notice about how students treat one another? Describe about how students at your school treat one another. In what ways is similar or different from your experiences at your school?
- How does social media affect a sense of community at your school?
- One teacher says, "We want kids to come out of this school loving learning and knowing how to learn." Do you see teachers cultivating a love of learning in this film? In what ways do your teachers help you love to learn and teach you how to learn?
- Do you feel a sense of school belonging? Do you feel responsible for the community at your school?

Suggested Activities

Four activities that may be used in conjunction with the film.

Activity Option #1: Social-Emotional Skill

Discuss the following social-emotional skills with the class and explain why each are important to their life as a student and as a member of society:

- a. Self-awareness
- b. Self-management
- c. Social awareness
- d. Relationship skills
- e. Responsible decision-making

Then, ask students to discuss moments in the film that relate to one or more of these skills (e.g., skill being taught, students exhibiting a skill, students not exhibiting a skill).

Copy / 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

Ask students to rank the following social-emotional skills in order of what they believe they *always need help* with to *never need help with* (more than one skill can fall into one category).

- a. Self-awareness
- b. Self-management
- c. Social awareness
- d. Relationship skills
- f. Responsible decision-making

Model the exercise for students.

Discuss as a class. Read each social-emotional skill 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 the social-emotional skills as they did.

Activity #2 My Ideal Middle School

Have students reflect on the film and what they like and don't like about The Center School. Ask students then reflect on their school and what they like and don't like about their school.

Next, ask students to draw two pictures, one that represents their reflection (likes and dislikes) of The Center School and another that represents their reflection (likes and dislikes) of their school. Ask each student to investigate both pictures for commonalities (e.g., similar dislikes, similar likes). Ask students to independently think about what this may mean about what an ideal middle school would be like for them. Have students write these thoughts down.

Then, ask students pair up with another student. Have each pair share their pictures and discuss each. Ask students to generate a list of commonalities across each pair of pictures. For example, what do both of their pictures of The Center School have in common (likes and/or dislikes)? Their school pictures (likes and dislikes)? Then ask both students to collectively investigate all four pictures for commonalities (e.g., similar dislikes, similar likes). Ask students to think about what this may mean about what an ideal middle school would be like for them.

Finally, engage the class in a discussion of what their ideal middle school would be like and generate a list of ideas for improving their current school to be more reflective of their ideal middle school.

Activity #3 Middle School Issues

Copy / project the diagram onto the board. Ask students to copy it on their own paper / 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:
 - How often it happens
 - 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 #4 My Thoughts on Being a Young Adolescent

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

- Adults can do things to help students with their friendships.
- Changing friend groups is easy.
- It doesn't matter if you cheat.
- It's risky to be too nice.
- It's better to be older.
- It's better to be younger.
- School should be fun.
- 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.

Changing By The Minute

A 62min documentary film providing an asset-based view of early adolescence, and part of the “Changing By The Minute documentary tool kit.” 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.

Film Credits

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Used by:



Made possible in part by contributions from:

Middle Grades Collaborative

New York State Council on the Arts with the support of
the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature

Lefkofsky Family Foundation

Completed with the support of the
Women Make Movies Production Assistance Program

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