

# Middle School Moments

**Discussion Guide for Use with Teacher Candidates (10min film)**



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## **Pre-Readings**

Suggested reading prior to viewing the film.

### Articles

- Bouton, B. (2021) Social emotional development of young adolescents: fact and fiction <https://www.amle.org/social-emotional-development-of-young-adolescents-fact-and-fiction/>
- Brinegar, K.M., Caskey, M.M. (2022) Developmental characteristics of young adolescents: research <https://www.amle.org/developmental-characteristics-of-young-adolescents/>
- Rebora, A. (2020). How teens' brains are different. *Educational Leadership*, 77(8), 58–59. [https://files.ascd.org/staticfiles/ascd/pdf/journals/ed\\_lead/el202005\\_brain.pdf](https://files.ascd.org/staticfiles/ascd/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el202005_brain.pdf)

### Books

- Bishop, P. A., & Harrison, L. M. (2021). *The successful middle school: This we believe*. AMLE.
- Brinegar, K. M., Harrison, L. M., & Hurd, E. (Eds.). (2019). *Equity & cultural responsiveness in the middle grades* (see especially pp. 3-21).

# Discussion Questions

After viewing the 10 min film, engage class in discussion. Ask teacher candidates to respond to each question with evidence from the film to back up their responses. This can be a whole class discussion or students can be divided into smaller groups and then reconvene later.

## Topic 1: Young Adolescent Experiences

### Areas for Discussion:

- Friendships, peer relations, drama
- Social media
- Social emotional learning
- Romantic interests
- Choices
- Mistakes
- Accountability

### Questions:

- What stands out to you about the young adolescent experiences highlighted in this film?
- In the film, students talk about friendship and friend groups, making friends, and sticking with a group of friends. How important are friendships? What role do friend groups play in the lives of young adolescents?
- What do you notice about friendships, peer relations, drama?
- What can you infer about the role of social media in young adolescents' lives?
- What do you notice about romantic interests?
- What can you recall from the film about student choices? Mistakes?
- How were students held accountable for their choices?
- How might such experiences impact young adolescents' schooling? Personal lives?
- Based on students' experiences, what might be good topics to include in advisory?

## Topic 2: Developmental Characteristics and Social Identities

### Areas for Discussion:

- Physical characteristics
- Intellectual characteristics
- Moral characteristics
- Psychological characteristics
- Social-emotional characteristics
- Social identities

## **Questions:**

- What developmental characteristics of young adolescents do you observe in the film?
- In what ways do the various characteristics of young adolescent development play out in the lives of middle school students?
- In what ways do students exhibit social emotional learning and skills (e.g., self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, social awareness and relationship skills)?
- What social identities do you observe or hear about in the film?
- What are the implications for being able to best teach and reach young adolescents?

## **Topic 3: School Environment**

### **Areas for Discussion:**

- Physical environment
- Schedule
- Resources
- Unstructured times (class transitions, recess, before/after school)

## **Questions:**

- How would you describe the school environment in the film?
- What do you notice about the physical environment?
- What do you notice about the school's schedule? How does it reflect school priorities?
- What types of resources do you notice?
- How does the school convey a sense of inclusivity and belonging?
- What do you recall about the unstructured times of day (e.g., class transitions, recess, before and after school)? What roles do such times play in young adolescents' lives?
- What can you infer about how school environment may influence teaching and learning?

## **Topic 4: Teaching and Learning**

### **Areas for Discussion:**

- Teacher-student relationships
- Classes
- Curriculum
- Responsive instruction
- Teaching strategies/methods
- Academic expectations
- Behavioral expectations

## **Questions:**

- What do you notice about teaching and learning at the school in the film?
- In what ways do teachers foster relationships with students in the film?
- What can you infer about classes at this school? Curriculum? Teaching strategies and methods?
- What is expected of students, academically and behaviorally? What kinds of expectations support developmentally and culturally responsive practices?

## **Topic 5: Choices Faced by Young Adolescents**

### **Areas for Discussion:**

- Peer groups
- Social media
- Behavior
- Romantic interests
- Academics

## **Questions:**

- What choices do young adolescents face in middle school?
- What can you recall from the film about student choices (positive and negative)?
- In what ways do peers influence the choices students make in the film?
- How does social media affect a sense of community?
- How can teachers help students practice making decisions in a healthy and supported environment?

## **Question 6: Peer Groups**

### **Areas for Discussion:**

- Identity
- Belonging
- Decision-making

## **Questions:**

- What role do peer groups play in young adolescents' lives?
- What do you notice about diversity of friendships and peer groups?
- Why is a sense of belonging to a peer group important to young adolescents?
- In what ways may educators support the development of positive peer relationships?



## Suggested Activities

Two possible activities to be used in conjunction with the film.

### Activity Option #1: Middle School Experiences

#### Before Viewing the Film:

- Have each teacher candidate create a visual collage of his/her/their middle school experience to share with the class.
- Have each teacher candidate share his/her/their collage.
- As a class, reflect on the experiences shared. Ask the class to identify commonalities among teacher candidates' middle school experiences.
- Have each teacher candidate create a Venn diagram (see Fig. 1) and fill in the left side of the Venn diagram with the list of common experiences of middle school.

#### While Viewing the Film:

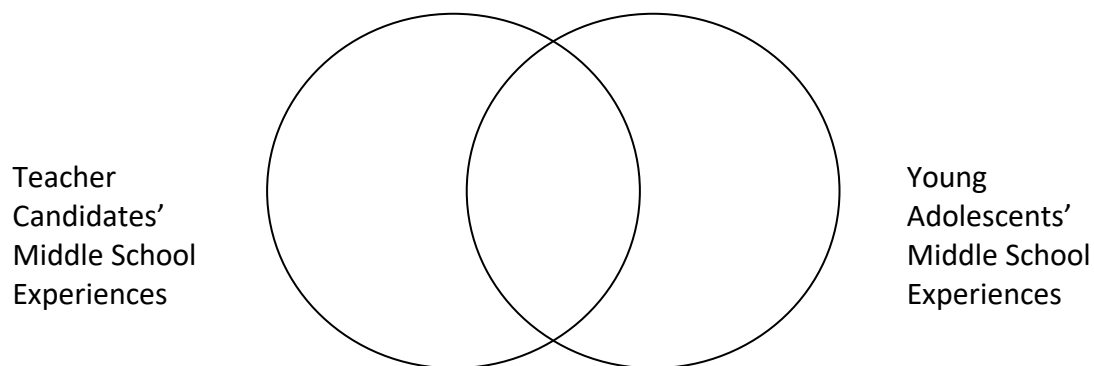
- Ask teacher candidates to play close attention to the types of young adolescent experiences highlighted in the film.

#### After Viewing the Film:

- Have teacher candidates work in pairs and come to a consensus on the experiences represented in the film. Have each pair partner with another pair and repeat the process.
- Have each quartet share out with the class. As a class, complete the right side of the Venn diagram without duplicating responses.

- Have the entire class discuss the commonalities and differences between teacher candidates' collective experiences in middle school and the experiences of the young adolescents in the film. Complete the center portion of the Venn diagram.
- Ask teacher candidates to think about and write down what these findings may mean for himself/herself/themselves as they prepare to become a middle school educator. Have teacher candidates pair up and share their responses. Conclude with a class discussion on the importance of truly understanding young adolescents.

**Figure 1. Middle School Experiences Venn Diagram**



## **Activity Option #2: KWLQ**

### **Before Viewing the Film:**

- Have each teacher candidate create a KWLQ table (see Table 1)
- Ask teacher candidates to write down everything that they know or think they know about young adolescents and middle school.
- Ask teacher candidates to write down what they want to know about young adolescents and middle school.
- Engage the class in a Stand and Share activity where teacher candidates share what they know about young adolescents and middle school (K column of the KWLQ table).

Make sure all ideas have been shared. Create a comprehensive classroom list on the board. Repeat this process for the “W” column of the KWLQ table.

### **While Viewing the Film:**

- Have teacher candidates write down what they learned about young adolescents and make note if it answers anything in their “W” column.

### **After Viewing the Film:**

- Have teacher candidates complete “L” column of their KWLQ table.
- Repeat the Stand and Share process to create a comprehensive classroom list on the board for what teacher candidates learned (L column of KWLQ table). Engage in class discussion about “L” column, pointing out connections to “K” and “W” columns, as appropriate. Questions for whole class discussion:
  - a. Did you learn something new about young adolescents and middle school?
  - b. Did you learn anything that contradicts what you thought you knew about young adolescents and middle school?
- Ask teacher candidates to write down questions they still have about young adolescents and middle school in “Q” column. Have teacher candidates share their remaining questions about young adolescents and middle school. Make sure all ideas have been shared. Create a comprehensive classroom list on the board. Determine the most salient questions and engage the class in a conversation using the film to support the conversation.

<b>K KNOW</b>	<b>W WANT TO KNOW</b>	<b>L LEARNED/ OBSERVED</b>	<b>Q QUESTIONS</b>

## Y'All R Real Ones: Middle School Moments

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.

### Film Credits

Producer/Director  
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Camilla Calamandrei

Composers  
Joel Goodman  
Aaron Srdoc

Designer & Animator  
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