

# G!RL BE HEARD

EDUCATION GUIDE



**HEALTH & ADVISORY**  
COMPANION CURRICULUM TO

*i am a girl*

DIRECTED BY REBECCA BARRY



## INTRODUCTION

Girl Be Heard ([girlbeheard.org](http://girlbeheard.org)) and the team behind the documentary film *I Am A Girl* ([iamagirl.com.au](http://iamagirl.com.au)) have partnered to raise awareness about human rights issues affecting girls around the world.

Through a series of lesson plans designed for high school students from grades 9-12, **Girl Be Heard Education Guides for *I Am A Girl*** are a practical and ready-to-use source for teachers to address pressing global and personal issues affecting girls around the world. This collection of lesson plans was designed with the Common Core curriculum in mind, so that teachers can easily use them to complement textbook and classroom work, help prepare students to succeed on standardized tests, excel in college, and contribute thoughtfully as advocates for their communities, locally and globally.

## I AM A GIRL

*I Am a Girl* (Director Rebecca Barry, 2013) is a documentary film that paints a realistic picture of what it means to be a girl in the twenty-first century.

The reality is that girls make up 1/7<sup>th</sup> of the world's population, yet still face alarming rates of discrimination and violence. Seven out of ten girls have or will experience physical and or sexual abuse in her lifetime.

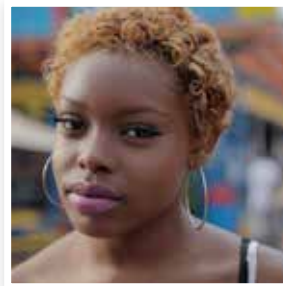
In spite of these obstacles, girls have found extraordinary ways to persevere. In the documentary, we hear their stories of strength, hope, courage, and a refusal to be held back. The journey takes the audience through an array of diverse cultures and societies around the globe: Afghanistan, Cameroon, Cambodia, the United States, Australia and Papua New Guinea.

While each of these girls has had a unique "growing up" experience dependent on her specific familial and societal expectations, what these girls share is the dream of rising above their circumstances.



### **AZIZA (AFGHANISTAN)**

Aziza highly values her education – something she wishes for all Afghan girls. She wants to study law at a university and dreams of becoming the first female president of her country.



### **BREANI (USA)**

Breani describes her neighborhood as a "black hole" where she sees many of her peers give up on their dreams entirely. With the help of her family, Breani aspires to overcome obstacles she faces growing up in one of the toughest projects in Brooklyn to become the 'Princess of Pop-Rap.'



### **HABIBA (CAMEROON)**

Habiba is marrying for love, but ponders all that she is giving up for her new life. What will it be like leaving behind her friends and family?



### **KATIE (AUSTRALIA)**

Intelligent and from a strong middle-class family, Katie has everything she wants and needs, yet suffers from depression. How will she cope with the stress of her final exams and her first forays into love?



### **KIMSEY (CAMBODIA)**

Kimsey was sex trafficked at age 12. Given the extreme poverty of her family, she became its sole provider with the little money she received during her exploitation in the sex trade. All she wants is for her child to be educated, so that she has opportunities for a better life.



### **MANU (PAPUA NEW GUINEA)**

In the final stages of her pregnancy, nineteen-year-old Manu must face the consequences of her decision to have her baby despite the reservations of her family. Manu dreams of having a healthy baby.



# G!RL BE HEARD

**OUR PHILOSOPHY: IF A GIRL CAN CHANGE HER OWN LIFE,  
SHE CAN CHANGE THE LIVES OF GIRLS EVERYWHERE.**

Girl Be Heard (<http://girlbeheard.org/>) is a non-profit theatre company that brings global issues affecting girls center stage by empowering young women (ages 12-21) to tell their stories.

7 out of 10 girls have or will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. 34% of girls in our country will become pregnant before the age of 20. And for far too many girls in the United States and around the world, the threat of being trafficked is all too real.

Given the challenges that girls face, it's important to educate the next generation of leaders about human rights issues affecting girls. Our program has three main components — after school programs, weekly workshops, and performances — that empower young women to become socially conscious

leaders. Girl Be Heard productions are inspired, written, and performed by girls ages 12 to 21 on the issues they care about most. Through writing and performance, our girls raise awareness about issues affecting young women in their communities and worldwide – from bullying to sex trafficking.

Girl Be Heard shows have inspired and continue to inspire audiences at the White House, United Nations, State Department, TED conferences, off Broadway and on national tours. Girl Be Heard also brings our shows, workshops, and education curriculum to public schools, universities, community centers, detention centers, and conferences to raise awareness about social justice issues affecting women and girls.





## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

The United Nations adopted Resolution 66/170 to declare October 11 International Day of the Girl, exemplifying that global leaders are finally ready to take action, prioritize and focus attention on girls. There is no better time to engage youth in exploring these critical human rights issues that are impacting the almost one billion young and adolescent girls worldwide.

We live in a world where:

- Up to 7 in 10 women around the world experience physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime <sup>1</sup>
- 62 million girls of primary school age are not in school <sup>2</sup>
- 100 million girls are missing due to female prenatal sex selection <sup>3</sup>
- Three quarters of the world's HIV sufferers under age twenty-five are women <sup>4</sup>

*I Am A Girl* explores patterns of inequality and canvasses the attitudes of the featured girls' mothers, fathers, and community. Through the film, we learn about the plight of girls in both developing and developed countries and the profound and disturbing discrimination that pervades today. In spite of obstacles these girls around the world face, they tell a story of strength, hope, courage, and a strong will to survive.

Students need only reflect on the massive gender imbalance of leadership positions to realize how far we have to go before

female voices are heard as clearly and as loudly as those of males. Out of 195 countries, only 22 are led by women<sup>5</sup> and, of Fortune 500 Chief Executive Officers, only 23 are women – that's 4.6%. The fact that the Equal Rights Amendment, which grants women equal rights in the United States Constitution, has never been passed exemplifies the need to open up dialogue about these issues with the next generation of leaders.

From childhood, we see girls around the world afforded fewer opportunities than their male peers. It remains more difficult for girls to complete education in many countries as they are seen to be less important than boys in ensuring the family's prosperity. Their role and value is often seen principally as child-bearer, mother, and wife.

Girl Be Heard has created these **Girl Be Heard Education Guides for *I Am A Girl*** on History/Social Studies, English Language Arts, and Health/Advisory to help teachers open up classroom discussions around these important human rights issues and to get students thinking about a future of gender equality.

The Girl Be Heard Education Guide for Health and Advisory is attached herein. The History/Social Studies and English Language Arts guides can be found on the *I Am A Girl* website: <http://www.iamagirl.com.au/education/>

<sup>1</sup> "United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign to UNiTE To End Violence Against Women." UN News Center. UN, n.d. Web. 09 Feb. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, comp. Children Out of School Measuring Exclusion from Primary Education. N.d. UNESCO report. P.O. Box 6128, Succursale Centre-Ville, Montreal, Quebec.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, comp. Unite To End Violence Against Women. N.d. United Nations Secretary General Campaign. Daily News Building, 220 East 42nd Street, New York, NY.

<sup>4</sup> "Women's Health." WHO.int. World Health Organization, Sept. 2013. Web. 09 Feb. 2015.

<sup>5</sup> "Female World Leaders Currently in Power." *Female World Leaders Currently in Power*. N.p., 22 Jan. 2015. Web. 19 Feb. 2015

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

In this guide, teachers can find a total of seven lesson plans for Health or Advisory classes covering the following topics:

ROLE MODELS  
SOCIAL MEDIA  
SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS  
MENTAL HEALTH

SEXUAL ABUSE/CONSENT  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH  
GENDER INEQUALITY

Each of the first six lesson plans corresponds to one of the girls' individual stories featured in the *I Am A Girl* Documentary. The seventh is a lesson for classes who have watched all six video vignettes or the full documentary. Teachers can access the **six video vignettes** corresponding to the six girls' stories (12 minutes each) and **full documentary** (88 minutes total) under the EDUCATION tab at <http://iamagirl.com.au>. It is also possible to bring the film to your local cinema through the Gathr platform <http://iamagirl.com.au/screenings-us/>

Each lesson plan is designed for a 40-45 minute classroom session and provides a guideline for timing, including a video vignette, at least one interactive activity, and a guided reflection. Suggested questions are provided for the guided reflection process. Teachers are encouraged to follow the natural conversation that develops among their students, which will be different for each classroom. Each lesson also provides suggestions for follow-up prompts that correspond to the material discussed in class and maintain a creative approach to addressing information. Teachers may find that the suggested follow up prompt is more than their students can do as a homework assignment, and should feel free to make adjustments or use the prompts to inspire larger projects for their students.

Teachers should note that this guide is not designed as a complete unit, but rather as individual lesson plans that teachers can use in any order or to any degree that is helpful to them. The lessons will be most useful if teachers are able to incorporate their own research and adjust the activities and prompts to fit the unique dynamics of their classrooms.

Teachers should also note that these lesson plans do not address all the topics covered in the film, such as sex trafficking, reproductive health, women's rights, colonialism, indigenous populations/rights, dictatorial regimes, and mental health/social services. These lesson plans are designed to be interactive, student driven, and a tool to spark conversation. They may not entirely replace other lesson plans but should be seen as a supplement to get students talking about the topics. It is up to the individual teacher to adapt these lessons to the reality of their classroom, to provide supplementary information and services, and to remind students of the available school psychological services in case these lessons trigger a strong emotional response.

## EVALUATION

Embedded within the I Am A Girl education website is a suite of evaluation tools.

Teachers are encouraged to:

- a. Get their students to complete the Audience Survey form as a way of starting to reflect on and think about the film. That form can be accessed by clicking on the "Seen the Film?" button on the I Am A Girl website <http://iamagirl.com.au> or using the following link <https://surveymonkey.com/s/iamagirlaudiencesurvey>.
- b. Teachers are encouraged to complete the Teacher Survey to provide feedback on the curriculum materials and the film. ([https://surveymonkey.com/s/iamagirl\\_teacherfeedback](https://surveymonkey.com/s/iamagirl_teacherfeedback))

Girl Be Heard is committed to creating a safe space for youth to engage in thoughtful dialogue around pressing issues facing girls, locally and globally. Ours is a "listening" model. We encourage teachers to empower and encourage the unique voices of each student to be heard in the classroom.



Aziza



## LESSON 1: AZIZA/ROLE MODELS

### LESSON PLAN

**OBJECTIVE:** To understand the importance of role models.

**LESSON PLAN BY:** Blanca Vivancos/Emilie Clark

**POPULATION:** High School students (grades 9-12)

**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will create and reflect on a drawing that shows their influence network.
- Students will watch a video connected to the topic.
- Students will be exposed to a reflection process through guiding questions.
- Students will develop a chart of influencers and analyze the impact these influencers have on their lives.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- A piece of paper and pencils, crayons, or markers, for each student.
- A chalkboard or whiteboard is helpful but not necessary.
- A video projector or other device to watch the film.

### THE INFLUENCE TREE (10 MINUTES)

The teacher asks students to draw the outline of a tree on their paper, with several main branches and sub branches. (The teacher can draw an example on the board.)

Next, the teacher asks the student to label the trunk of the tree “me” and to fill in the branches with the names or titles of the different role models in their lives. The main branches should be direct role models, while the sub branches focus on indirect. (For example, a main branch may be labeled “sister” while a sub branch may be labeled “Lady Gaga.”)

Depending on the time frame of the class, the length of this activity is flexible. Students can color the tree, create drawings for their most important role models, etc.

Watch the clip of Aziza's story from I AM A GIRL (15 Minutes).

### REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (20 MINUTES)

- What things did you realize by doing this exercise?
- Looking at your tree, who are the strongest influences in your life right now?
- How do you think those influences have evolved over the years?
- Looking at your tree, try to identify the less positive influences. What strategies could you think of to minimize the influence of those people?
- Who do you think were Aziza's influencers, and what kind of influence did they have on her?
- What makes someone a good role model? Are you a role model to anyone else (for example a younger sibling, friend, or family member)?

### ADDITIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

#### UNICEF on Girls' Education and Gender Equality:

*"Girls' education is both an intrinsic right and a critical lever to reaching other development objectives. Providing girls with an education helps break the cycle of poverty: educated women are less likely to marry early and against their will; less likely to die in childbirth; more likely to have healthy babies; and are more likely to send their children to school. When all children have access to a quality education rooted in human rights and gender equality, it creates a ripple effect of opportunity that influences generations to come."*

Read More here: [http://unicef.org/education/bege\\_70640.html](http://unicef.org/education/bege_70640.html)

### SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP PROMPT

**Influencers Chart** – Rewrite the names of your role models into a chart with three additional columns. Fill the first column with aspects of the role model relationship that nurture you (are positive), and the second column with aspects that drain you (are negative). In the third column, write how you could use that relationship differently.

Note: Teachers can provide pre-made influence charts for students to fill out for homework (see below example).

Role Model	Nurturing/Positive Aspects of Relationship	Draining/Negative Aspects of Relationship	How I Could Use This Relationship Differently
Friends	Comforting, always there to talk to, make me laugh	Pressure to look a certain way/fit in.	Be more honest with my friends



Breani



## LESSON 2: BREANI/FRIENDS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

### LESSON PLAN

**OBJECTIVE:** To work on the importance of friendship and how to navigate it in the social media world.

**LESSON PLAN BY:** Blanca Vivancos/Emilie Clark

**POPULATION:** High School students (grades 9-12)

**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will create their real life identity circles, and their online life identity circles.
- Students will watch a video connected to the topic.
- Students will be exposed to a reflection process through guiding questions.
- Students will be prompted to work on a creative writing piece.
- Students will have the chance to create their dream identity circles for 5 years from present time.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- One sheet of paper and a pen for all students.
- A chalkboard or whiteboard is helpful but not necessary.
- A video projector or other device to watch the film.

## IDENTITY CIRCLES (10 MINUTES)

\*\*To speed this activity up, teachers can prepare sheets of paper with identity circles for each student before the class begins (use below template). In this case, the first set of directions are not necessary.

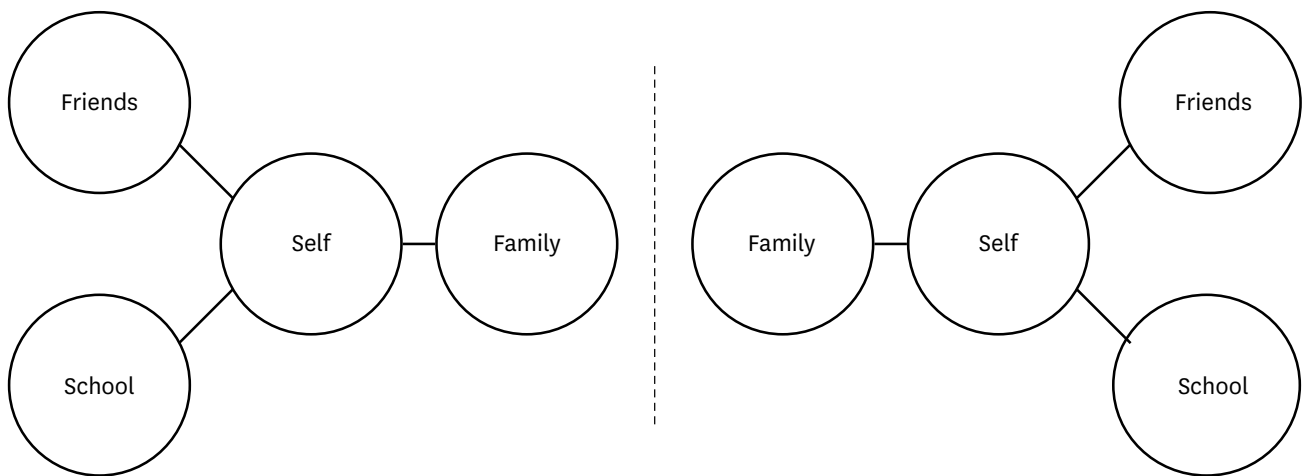
First, the teacher asks students to fold a piece of paper down the middle and then draw one circle on each side of the page. It is helpful for the teacher to demonstrate on the chalkboard or whiteboard.

Students should label these two circles “self”. Students should then draw three connected circles on the outside of their “self” circles, and label them “Family,” “Friends,” and “School.” (See Image below for reference).

The teacher asks the students to label the left hand side of the page “My Identity,” and fill in the three outer circles on that side with things they associate with their identity as related to “family,” “friends,” and “school.” Students can write words, paragraphs, phrases, or draw pictures.

Next the teacher asks students to turn to the other side of the paper and ask themselves “What do other people think or see about my identity from my social media profiles?” This could include Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc.

Students should label this set of circles “My Online Identity,” and fill in the circles on the right side with this question in mind.



Watch the clip of Breani's story from I AM A GIRL (15 Minutes).

## REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (20 MINUTES)

- Go back to your two sets of Identity Circles. What things are similar and what things are different on each side?
- What part of these identity circles makes you happiest? Which side is it on? What makes you most proud? Most concerned?
- In what ways is the right side of the paper (the “social media” side) an accurate representation of who you are? In what ways is it not?
- How can you connect that with Breani's story?

## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

**Girl Be Heard Fact Check:** Did you know that 94% of teens ages 12-17 have a Facebook account, and spend approximately three hours a day on Facebook?<sup>1</sup> That's over 1,000 hours a year. For all of that time we devote to the online representations of ourselves, most social media users report feeling worse, not better, about themselves after spending time online. Social media has become the platform for a bullying epidemic. 95% of teens who use social media report witnessing or being victims to Cyber Bullying.<sup>2</sup>

## SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP PROMPTS

**Writing Prompt:** Look at your last Facebook or Twitter status and use it as a prompt to write a one page monologue about something you care about in any style you want (poetry, prose, song, short scene). Invite students to read, sing or perform their work in front of the class to open up dialogue about issues students care about most.

**Dream Identity Circles:** Recreate one set of your identity circles using the same three sections, "family," "friends," and "school." Fill these in based on what you hope your identity will be five years from now.

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<sup>1</sup> "Teens and Social Media Use." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science, and Tech. Pew Research Center, 21 May 2013. Web. 9 Feb. 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites." Pew Research Centers Internet, Science, and Tech. Pew Research Center, 08 Nov. 2011. Web. 09 Feb. 2015.

*Habiba*



## LESSON 3: HABIBA/SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

### LESSON PLAN

**OBJECTIVE:** To work on the importance of social expectations

**LESSON PLAN BY:** Blanca Vivancos/Emilie Clark

**POPULATION:** High School students (grades 9-12)

**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will experiment with their perceptions of what it means to do things “like a boy” and “like a girl.”
- Students will have the opportunity to experientially reflect on what it means to be a girl.
- Students will watch a video connected to the topic.
- Students will be exposed to a reflection process through guiding questions.
- Students will be prompted to work on a presentation.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

The following activities will work best in a clear and open space: either a classroom with the desks pushed to one side (assembly style) where students can sit after the activity to reflect and watch the film, in a gymnasium, or assembly stage. Remember that immediately following the activities you will need access to a video projector or other device to watch the film.



## LIKE A BOY/LIKE A GIRL (5 MINUTES)

The teacher asks students to walk around the space, in any direction they wish, at a normal speed. This is their time to get comfortable with the space.

*The teacher asks students to walk around the space “like a girl.”*

*The teacher asks students to walk around the space “like a boy.”*

*The teacher asks students to stand “like a girl,” and then “like a boy.”*

*The teacher asks students to laugh “like a girl,” and then “like a boy.”*

### Reflection questions after the warm up exercise:

*How did it feel to walk in each identity?*

*How would you explain the difference between a person’s gender and a person’s sex?*

## HUMAN BAROMETER (10 MINUTES)

**\*\*Note to teachers:** For this activity, students will position themselves in the space in response to certain statements. One side of the room represents “I Agree,” and the opposite side represents “I Disagree.” The middle represents a range of greys. The teacher will prompt the students to move to the part of the room that reflects their level of agreement with the following prompts:

- I should have the right to say anything I want
- I am my own person; no one’s opinions affect me
- Girls and boys are treated the same at school
- Boys and girls are treated the same in my family
- Girls are just as good at math as boys are
- My gender affects the things I say or do
- People do not have to identify as either a “boy” or a “girl” (“man” or “woman”)
- My gender is an important part of my identity
- Men are better at making decisions than women
- I will have the same amount of opportunities as my male (if you are female) or female (if you are male) classmates when I grow up
- I think people care about what I have to say
- I believe I have an influence on the world I live in

Watch the clip of Habiba’s story from I AM A GIRL (15 Minutes).

## REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (20 MINUTES)

- What things did you realize while doing the exercise?
- What prompts made you question where to position yourself in the space? Elaborate upon this thought.
- How do you think your family, friends, and society in general influence your response to the prompts?
- How can you connect your experience about gender roles and Habiba’s story?
- What’s a stereotype? What stereotypes are placed on Habiba? What stereotypes are placed on you?

## SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP PROMPT

**Beyond Expectations:** Create a five-minute presentation using whatever style you wish (poster, PowerPoint, speech, video, song, etc.) about how you would like to live your life beyond the expectations of others.

Katie



## LESSON 4: KATIE/MENTAL HEALTH

### LESSON PLAN

**OBJECTIVE:** To raise awareness about mental health issues faced by teens

**LESSON PLAN BY:** Blanca Vivancos/Emilie Clark

**POPULATION:** High School students (grades 9-12)

**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- A Post-It note or sticker for each student.
- A video projector or other device to watch the film.

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will work on focus and attention to detail.
- Students will begin to pay attention to changes in others and themselves.
- Students will watch a video connected to the topic.
- Students will be exposed to a reflection process through guiding questions.
- Students will build a self check in board.

### WHAT CHANGED? (15 MINUTES)

Students will divide into pairs and the teacher will ask the students to observe their partners carefully. The teacher will then tell students to turn away from their partner and change something about their appearance. Next, the teacher will ask students to indicate what changed on their partner, by placing the sticker or Post-It on the difference.

Finally, the teacher will then prompt the students to check in with each other to see if each one was able to accurately identify the change.

Watch the clip of Katie's story from I AM A GIRL (15 Minutes).

## REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (15 MINUTES)

- How do you think the first exercise connects with Katie’s story?
- In what ways is it important for you to take care of the people you love?
- What external signs could be indicators of something going wrong in a friend or family member?
- What is the importance of our emotional network in helping us through hard times?

## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

TeenMentalHealth.org has excellent resources for teens and their adult mentors that can help them understand mental health related concerns and break down stigmas.

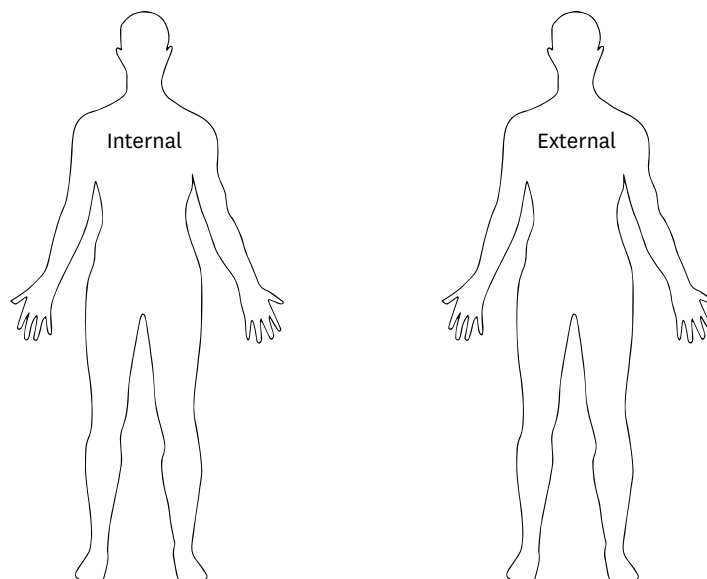
*“Mental illnesses are disorders of brain function. They have many causes and result from complex interactions between a person’s genes and their environment. Having a mental illness is not a choice or moral failing. Mental illnesses occur at similar rates around the world, in every culture and in all socio economic groups.”*

Read more here: <http://teenmentalhealth.org/>

## SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP PROMPT

Self Check in Board – Take a piece of paper and fold it in half, creating two sides. On each side, draw a simple image of yourself (this can be a stick figure). Label the left side of the paper “external,” and the right side “internal.” Using colors or words indicate what things are important for you to consider when you check in with yourself. The “external” side should indicate physical things such as sore muscles or stomach aches, the “internal” side should indicate your emotional/mental wellbeing such as confusion or nervousness.

To simplify this homework, teachers can provide students with pre-drawn images that they simply have to fill in (see the example below).



Kimsey



## LESSON 5: KIMSEY/SEXUAL ABUSE - CONSENT

### LESSON PLAN

**OBJECTIVE:** To work on the meaning and importance of "Yes," "No," and consent in personal and sexual relationships

**LESSON PLAN BY:** Blanca Vivancos/Emilie Clark

**POPULATION:** High School students (grades 9-12)

**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will identify indicators of consent and reflect on the importance of "yes" and "no."
- Students will watch a video connected to the topic.
- Students will explore the "missing link" in today's society: the critical need to talk about sex with your partner, before you have it.
- Students will be exposed to a reflection process through guiding questions.
- Students will think about consent and rape in the world around them.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Red, green and blue post-it notes.
- A blackboard or whiteboard.
- A video projector or other device to watch the film.

### MEANING OF CONSENT (15 MINUTES)

The teacher will write the title "What Is the Meaning of..." on the board, then divide the board below into two sections labeled "Yes" and "No." Each student will be given a set of post-it notes (red, green, and blue). Students will be asked to individually write all the physical and verbal signs of Yes (using one green post-it note for each of those), and No (using one red post-it note for each of those) in a sexual context. They can use as many post-it notes as needed to write down all the things that might mean Yes or No.

Students will be given 10 minutes to write down their post-it notes, and then place them on the corresponding side of the board. Then, the teacher will read the post-its out loud and will merge the similar post-its until they form a clean list.

Once those two lists are made, a third list will be created titled "Things that can affect my ability to give consent..." students will be asked to repeat the process in blue post-it notes.

Once the three lists are completed, the teacher will guide the reflection process.



Watch the clip of Kimsey's story from I AM A GIRL (15 Minutes).

### REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (15 MINUTES)

- How would you define mutual consent?
- How do you know if someone has consented? How do you show your own consent?
- What do you think can happen if there is no mutual consent before two people engage in sexual activity?
- Some people have said that we live in a “rape culture.” What do you think this means? Why does rape exist?
- What things can make it difficult for you to speak up in a relationship with someone you care about?
- What things can affect consent (such as alcohol use, peer pressure, etc)?
- Some policy makers suggest that sex education begin in kindergarten by teaching boys and girls to respect one another. What do you think of this approach?
- What do you think the US can do to ensure that women are treated more equally?

### ADDITIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

New York Times Article: Renowned feminist activist Gloria Steinem and sociologist and gender equality advocate Michael Kimmel co-wrote an article for the New York Times on California's new “Yes Means Yes” bill.

*“Invading bodies has been taken less seriously by the law than invading private property, even though body-invasion is far more traumatic.... That’s why the recent passage of Senate Bill 967 in California is such a welcome game-changer in understanding and preventing sexual assault.... Until this bill, the prevailing standard has been ‘no means no.’ If she says no (or, more liberally, indicates any resistance with her body), then the sex is seen as nonconsensual. That is, it’s rape. Under such a standard, the enormous gray area between ‘yes’ and ‘no’ is defined residually as ‘yes’: Unless one hears an explicit ‘no,’ consent is implied. ‘Yes means yes’ completely redefines that gray area. Silence is not consent; it is the absence of consent. Only an explicit ‘yes’ can be considered consent.”*

Read the full article here:

[http://nytimes.com/2014/09/05/opinion/michael-kimmel-and-gloria-steinem-on-consensual-sex-on-campus.html?\\_r=1](http://nytimes.com/2014/09/05/opinion/michael-kimmel-and-gloria-steinem-on-consensual-sex-on-campus.html?_r=1)

### SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP PROMPT

1) Write a poem that begins with the line:

“I am a girl and this is how I am going to change the world...”

“I am a boy and this is how I am going to change the world...”

Teacher’s Note: Encourage students to choose a gender identity that is not their own.

2) Write a poem that begins with the line:

“Yes means yes...”

(in response to NY Times editorial above by Gloria Steinem and Michael Kimmel, see above)

Manu



## LESSON 6: MANU/PLANNED PARENTHOOD: -REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

### LESSON PLAN

**OBJECTIVE:** To help students reflect about reproductive health and the role that reproductive health services play in one's development

**LESSON PLAN BY:** Blanca Vivancos/Emilie Clark

**POPULATION:** High School students (grades 9-12)

**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will creatively work on how information affects decision-making.
- Students will watch a video connected to the topic.
- Students will be exposed to a reflection process through guiding questions.
- As a group, students will create a reproductive health resource guide.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Two pieces of paper per student.
- Other small random objects, enough for each student (toothpicks, paperclips, bobby pins, strands of yarn, etc).
- A video projector or other device to watch the film.

### OBJECTS AND DECISIONS (15 MINUTES)

Using one piece of paper and one of each of the materials provided, the teacher asks each student to spend two minutes creating an object. Next, the teacher asks students to spend about one minute writing down—on the second piece of paper—the name of their object, its use, and its benefits and dangers.

The teacher then splits the class up into three groups and chooses one object for each group to work with (no one should be in a group working with their own object). The teacher asks students to spend two minutes coming up with a story line under the prompt: You are stranded in a new and foreign place. Where are you? What are the conditions?

The teacher places the object in front of each group and incorporates it into a story (i.e. “you have found a strange object. It is unlike anything you have ever seen and you have no information on it. It could be incredibly dangerous or it could be the very thing that saves you.”) Teachers ask the groups to decide what they will do with the object.

The teacher then provides the group with the piece of paper that the creator of the object wrote indicating the object's name, uses, benefits, and dangers. Again, the teacher asks the group how they would use the object.

Watch the clip of Manu's story from I AM A GIRL (15 Minutes).

### REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (15 MINUTES)

- During the exercise, how did you feel about not having information?
- How did your experience change when you did have the information you needed?
- How can you connect that experience to Manu's story?
- What type of information would you have shared with her if you had the chance?

### ADDITIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

World Health Organization Factsheet: The World Health Organization's factsheets on reproductive health provide global statistics and information on sexually transmitted infections, women's health, family planning, female genital mutilation, contraception/emergency contraception, maternal mortality, and adolescent pregnancy.

Maternal deaths are the second biggest killer of women of reproductive age. Every year, approximately 287,000 women die due to complications in pregnancy and childbirth; 99% of them are in developing countries.

Read more here: <http://who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs334/en/>

Teachers can consider pointing students to the following resources for the creation of their mental health resource guide:

Mental Health topics for youth: <http://mentalhealth.gov/talk/young-people/>

New York City Database for teens on topics from dating violence to peer pressure:  
<http://nyc.gov/html/doh/teen/html/home/home.shtml>

Department of Health services database: <http://healthfinder.gov/FindServices/SearchContext.aspx?topic=5013>

Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> 1-800-273-TALK.

### SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP PROMPT

Reproductive Health Resource Guide: The teacher will assign each student a different topic to research and write about in order to create a reproductive health resource guide for the class and future students. The topics should include safe practices, STDs, services available in the area, etc. If time allows, the teacher can give students options to pick the topic that interests them most. Each student should have a separate topic (while several students will have safe practices as the umbrella topic, they should each have a specific topic to research such as condom use, dental dams, oral contraception, etc.) It will be helpful for teachers to create a comprehensive list of what they want in a reproductive health resource guide prior to assigning this homework task.

# LESSON 7: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A GIRL?

## LESSON PLAN

**LESSON PLAN BY:** Blanca Vivancos/Emilie Clark

**POPULATION:** High School students (grades 9-12)

**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will have the opportunity to experientially reflect on what it means to be a girl.
- Students will watch a video connected to the topic.
- Students will be exposed to a reflection process through guiding questions.
- Students as a group will create a reproductive health resource guide.
- Students will reflect on the role they can play in empowering themselves.
- Students will reflect on how to support their fellow women.

**MATERIAL NEEDED:**

- In order to complete this lesson, students must watch the full documentary, or all six of the education vignettes in advance.
- The following activity will work best in a clear and open space: Either a classroom with the desks pushed to one side (assembly style) where students can sit after the activity to reflect and watch the film, a gymnasium, or an assembly stage. Remember that immediately following the activities you will have to have access to a video projector or other device to watch the film.

**TEACHERS WILL ALSO NEED:**

- A deck of cards

### CARDS AND STATUS (10 MINUTES)

The teacher will distribute one card per student. The students may not look at their own card. The student must hold their card up without looking at the card, so that everyone can see the card except for the student. The teacher will give the students 5-8 minutes for the students to interact with each other according to the status on the card. Joker, 2 and 3 are the lowest statuses and Queen/King/Ace are the highest. Students must interact with each other based on the statuses on the card.

Once the students have had time to interact with everyone in the room they should form a line based on where they think they are in the status hierarchy. The people with the most status should be on one end and the people with the least amount of status should end up on the other end of the room.

Teachers should use this exercise to begin the discussion with their students about gender and status. Questions to be asked of the students can include:

- What is privilege?
- Which gender has the most status/privilege in your hometown, state, country? Why? Which gender has the least amount of privilege in your hometown, state, country? Why?
- What are some benefits that come with having privilege/status?
- What are some of the privileges each of the girls have in the film?
- To change the status of women in your hometown, what are some of the privileges that can be granted?
- To change the status of women in your country, what are some privileges that can be granted?
- What are some privileges you have as a student?
- What can you (as a student) do to change the status of women and girls?



### **REFLECTION ACTIVITY (10 MINUTES)**

The teacher will give each student a piece of paper divided down the middle and ask them to label the left side “advantages” and the right side “disadvantages.” Then, the teacher can ask the students to free write for 5 minutes (lists, words, or short sentences are fine), describing what they see as advantages and disadvantages for girls in their country or communities.

Students will share select items from their list for the class to discuss.

### **SHAKING HANDS (10 MINUTES)**

This activity should prompt a reflection on how everyone has the power to influence and change the most varied situations. Connecting that idea with some every day situations where girls are at a disadvantage or have not had the space they deserve, will help the teacher to prompt a reflection on how everyone can be the change they want to see.

Two students will shake hands while the rest of the class observes. The teacher will ask them to freeze while shaking hands. One of the two students will leave and return to the group. A new student will come up to the remaining student from the original pair (who should still be frozen with arm outstretched) and find a new way to complete the image that the person is physicalizing. (If students struggle with this concept, it might be helpful to have the teacher do a demonstration round at this point.) They can complete the image by stepping behind the person and pretending to show them how to throw a ball, placing their hand on one finger as if to remove a ring, etc. The first student to be in the image will return to the group and another volunteer will come up to complete the image in a new way. The class will continue as such until everyone has been part of the image. Students need not go in any particular order, and can be encouraged to complete the image whenever inspired to do so.

### **REFLECTION ACTIVITY (15 MINUTES)**

The teacher will write the names of all six girls in the movie on the board, with a few lines or chunk of space by each name and an area labeled “advantages” and “disadvantages.” The teacher will prompt the students to look briefly back over their lists and begin to share things that are also true for the girls in the film. For example, if one student wrote, “Girls are not taken as seriously” on her list, this could also go under disadvantages for Kimsey or Habiba. The class will work together to complete small lists of advantages and disadvantages for each girl. Some of these may come from the students’ original lists and some may not. This may prompt a discussion on how the situation of girls is different in the US and in their communities from what it is for the girls in the film.



Gathr a screening of I AM A GIRL at your local cinema

<http://iamagirl.com.au/screenings-us/>

For DVD enquiries please visit Women Make Movies

<http://wmm.com/filmcatalog/pages/c864.shtml>



**Created by:** Blanca Vivancos, Lead Teaching Artist  
Emilie Clark, Executive Assistant and Theatre Company Member

**Edited by:** Jessica Greer Morris, Executive Director  
Ashley Marinaccio, Artistic Director  
Abigail Ramsay, Director of Global Partnerships  
Josh Rubin, Mental Health Policy Expert and Board Member

**Special thanks to:** Vicki Mooney, Native American Playwright, The Eagle Project  
Jenny Navasky, Counselor, Humanities Preparatory Academy  
Taina Bien-Aime, Executive Director, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women

Breani's music is available on iTunes.

**A Girl Be Heard and I AM A GIRL Collaboration**

**G!R  
BE HEARD**

*i am a girl*

@GirlBeHeard2014

# **G!RL** **BE HEARD**

## **ADDENDUM**



# REAL GIRLS REAL STORIES

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Empower girls everywhere to speak out for change by supporting Girl Be Heard, a non-profit theater group that brings global issues affecting girls center stage. Learn more at [girlbeheard.org](http://girlbeheard.org)



# G!RL BE HEARD



# G!RL BE HEARD

## MISSION:

Girl Be Heard is a non-profit **theatre company** that brings **global issues** affecting girls center stage **empowering** young women to tell their stories.



## OUR PHILOSOPHY

If a girl can change her own life, she can change the lives of girls everywhere.



## WHY DO WE DO THIS WORK?

- Out of 195 countries, only 17 are led by women.<sup>1</sup>
- Of Fortune 500 CEOs, 23 are women – that's 4.6%.<sup>2</sup>
- Women hold 18% of our elected Congressional office. Women of color hold only 5%.
- In the United States, women still earn 77¢ for every \$1 a man earns. In certain cases, African American women earn 64¢ and Latinas 55¢.

## RAVE REVIEWS

*"Fearless, political theatre."*

– **Huffington Post**

*"Can't miss production."*

– **Ebony Magazine**

*"Inspiring to see bright, confident young women holding forth on stage."*

– **The New Yorker**

*"Join in the truth-telling as told by clear voices of girls before pretense or pressure have quieted them."*

– **Gloria Steinem**

## EDUCATION SERVICES

- After-School Program
- School Assembly Performances
- International Cross-Cultural Exchange Program
- Teacher Training

 Girl Be Heard

 @GirlBeHeard



212-260-4475 | 80 E. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, 301a New York, NY 10003 | [girlbeheard.org](http://girlbeheard.org)

<sup>1</sup> "Female World Leaders Currently in Power." *Female World Leaders Currently in Power*. N.p., 22 Jan. 2015. Web. 19 Feb. 2015

<sup>2</sup> "Women CEOs of S&P 500." *Knowledge Center*. Catalyst Inc., 13 Jan. 2015. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.

# G!RL BE HEARD



## GIRL BE HEARD ORIGINAL SHOWS

**9MM AMERICA:** *9mm America* explores America's culture of violence. Young women share their experiences living with the threat of gun violence in their neighborhoods, from East New York to the South Bronx.

**DISPLACED:** Inspired by stories of girls living in refugee camps, *displaced* is based on personal stories of women and girls who've experienced displacement and homelessness in NYC and abroad.

**GIRL BE HEARD: CONGO:** Theatre-inspired activism devised with youth leaders working in the Democratic Republic of Congo to raise awareness about the rape epidemic in Congo.

**GIRLPOWER: SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST:** A groundbreaking call to action, raising awareness around issues such as bullying, body image, self-esteem, race, and LGBTQ identity. Audiences experience a perspective of what it means to be a girl in today's society.

**TRAFFICKED:** The story of 15 sex trafficked girls across the globe. The show puts a name and face to the countless girls enslaved into the 38 billion dollar a year sex industry.

**AMERICA'S DIRTY SECRET: HUNGER, HOMELESSNESS, POVERTY, AND THE STREETS:** Rumbling stomachs are not just happening in foreign lands; children across the United States are going hungry. There has been a 40% increase in homeless children in the US, the largest increase since the Great Depression. The recession has made vulnerable our most vulnerable population: our children.



212-260-4475 | 80 E. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, 301a New York, NY 10003 | [girlbeheard.org](http://girlbeheard.org)



# G!RL BE HEARD

**Bring Girl Be Heard  
to your school!**



*To book a show, workshop, teacher training or bring our full curriculum and after school program to your school, please visit our "Menu of Services" at [girlbeheard.org](http://girlbeheard.org).*

## **Performances**

Girl Be Heard shows educate, empower and engage audiences in schools, universities, community settings and corporate events. These award-winning performances – seen at the White House, TED conferences and the United Nations – are written and performed by girls (ages 12-21) about issues they care about most, from bullying to body image.

## **Workshops**

Interactive sessions may include arts-based advocacy, leadership, gender-related issues, bullying, and global issues affecting girls. Topic specific workshops often cover current issues facing a local community and are devised in partnership with school principals, guidance counselor and parents. Workshops may incorporate show excerpts. Girl Be Heard residencies can also be set up in schools, in addition to Teacher Trainings.

## **Cross-Cultural Exchange**

Girl Be Heard hosts groups from around the country and the world. Customized, girl-powered visits include sight seeing, learning about social issues that impact our city, and special performances that shed light on NYC's social fabric as told by our girls. Previous exchanges have included visits to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, culinary tours of immigrant NY, picnicking in Central Park and boating around the City.

**80 East 11th Street Suite 301A New York, NY 10003 [girlbeheard.org](http://girlbeheard.org)**

## Family Owned and Operated

By Betsy Perez, Age 23



At age nine, I was too much body for my age. I don't know if it was the platanos or the queso frito, but this girl was busting out of everything. And then I got my period. I swear I thought my mother was going to rush me to the emergency room but all she said was, "Mira muchacha, relax girl. You're a woman now." My mother and I hadn't had "the talk." The one about becoming a woman. About how to safeguard "my popolita." Not let anyone touch that part of me. It was so confusing. Especially since everyone was touching my popolita but me.

At five, I opened up shop without even realizing. It was a family owned business, I guess. Cousins and a very involved Uncle Freddy took pride in my shop. Polished me up every week...it happened so often and for so many years that it became normal. I thought this was how I was supposed to act, how I was supposed to show love. I thought that everyone's first sexual experiences are supposed to be like this. Los primos se priman is what we call it in Latino culture. It's a saying we have for incest. I don't know how true that is for you, but it was for me.

Every weekend, my family would get together religiously for dominoes, bingo and cards. Uncle Freddy would catch me in the cuts. Those dark spaces in the house where no one sees a thing. He would ever so subtly trace the straps of my tank top, rub me down quickly. Our "quickies" he called it.

Then he started to ask my mother every weekend to let me come over to play...allegedly with cousin Lucy, but she was rarely there. He was my mentor. I learned the art of luring and manipulation. I learned to say "It's ok, no one is looking." To reassure Lorena and Cynthia when they got hooked. Uncle Freddy taught us well. We promised we would never tell. We would never tell anyone.

**@BetsyPerez2014**



## Look At Me

by Breani Michele, Age 18

Look at me.  
What do you see?  
Am I a 10, a 7, or a 3?  
Or maybe I'm a 9.5 because there's not enough  
meat in my thighs.  
Naaa, I'm a 10!  
No, I can't be a 10; I'm less because there's not  
enough in my chest.  
It's all about your breast butt and thighs.  
It's my body that counts, boys don't really look  
at your lips nose and eyes.  
How about I let Facebook decide I have too  
much clothes on.  
This shirt makes the picture look all wrong  
Click, click...

Yeah, now this picture looks nice: a bra and jeans real tight.  
And nobody should have nothing to say 'cause Kim Kardashian had a picture like this,  
and she was dressed the same way.  
If she could do it, I could do it too! Right?  
In one picture my back was turned to the camera, and all I had on was tights.  
That picture got almost 500 likes.

Boys think I'm so sexy and my body is great.  
Girls are always jealous. I think all they do is hate.  
I have one best friend, she and I can relate.  
We kissed a few times, so I guess we're not straight

Boys love us.  
They really love us, always asking us on dates.  
I don't get along with girls,  
so I think we were brought together by fate.  
For me, growing up wasn't easy. I always got teased.  
Facebook just has a way of boosting my self-esteem.  
Go ahead, judge me. Do what you please.  
You just don't understand how much those likes mean to me.

**@BreaniMichele2014**

## Chatty Belly

Allysia Potter, age 20

I sometimes trace the stretch marks on my hips with  
dark black ink,  
and pretend that they are quotation marks,  
and fill in what my belly thinks.

“Man, I’m starving, can you throw something my way?  
Feed me, Jesus Christ! I’ve had nothing all day.  
I know you can hear me, and you feel me quite frank.  
You’ll get yourself nowhere on a big empty tank”.

Hah, oh yeah, my belly cannot lie.

Believe me, I know her. She’s never far from my thighs.  
You see, I know what my belly thinks, and I can handle  
her okay.

The real horror, however,  
is what other people say.

“Fat ass, cow, waste of space,  
blimp, beached whale, beep-beep, pick up the pace.  
Miss piggy, lard ass, thunder thighs, and fat.

I’ve even had people ask me, “would you like fries with that?”

Men my age are too small, plastic furniture scares me,  
I know all the weight limits, and bunk beds are the enemy.

I’m a size 16, and I eat less than you.

I exercise daily, and there’s nothing I can’t do.

But at the end of the day, no matter what I cook,  
most people can’t get over  
that this is just the way I look.

**@AllysiaPotter2014**





## Halle's Story

Halle Paredes, age 15

If you had told me last year that my life would have turned out the way it has, I would never have believed you. When I was 12 years old, I suffered a concussion while playing hockey for my school.

After going to the doctor, I was confined in my room: no stimulation, no light, and no loud noises for 4 weeks. It was a nightmare with only my thoughts to keep me company.

When I was finally able to go to school, I was different. I was extremely sensitive. I was always feeling tired or sick, and I just didn't feel like

myself. One night in April, I couldn't sleep. I couldn't stop my insecurities from swirling around like a tornado in my head. **I felt so overwhelmed with self-hate and sadness. I took it out on myself.**

It was like I was under a spell of my own conjuring. I wasn't sure what came over me. I looked around to find the sharpest object I could and proceeded to cut my forearms. Once released from that spell, I realized what a big mistake I had made. I promised myself that this was a one-time thing. The next day, I didn't tell anyone. I told myself it wasn't a big deal.

Over the course of a week, I broke my promise and cut myself several more times. Far off in my mind I knew it was a problem, but I didn't want to face it. I decided I should tell a friend. I hoped she might tell an adult because I wasn't strong enough to. The only thing she told me to do was to stop. My habit worsened. I graduated from using household objects to using razors, which scared me. I couldn't stop. I was cutting more and more: six to seven times a day. No matter where I was, I couldn't stop thinking about the next time I could cut myself. As I continued cutting, suicidal thoughts began to appear. As much as I had wanted to keep my cutting a secret, I needed to tell someone before it got worse. **I needed to be my own hero.**

I had to tell my guidance counselor. I had attempted to tell her several times before but was too scared. This time I would do it. It took all of my courage and strength. If I didn't tell her now, I never would.

This was the beginning of my recovery. I was sent to the hospital and learned – for the first time – that I am not alone. I learned that one out of twelve teenagers are just like me, struggling with self-harm. **I wish I could say relapse is not in my story.** I was in and out of hospitals before I joined Girl Be Heard. Girl Be Heard has changed my life forever. Today, I can use my story at Girl Be Heard to help others to stop self-harm. I've made lifelong friends and learned my true potential as an artist, songwriter, singer and most importantly, as a person. I will be forever thankful for Girl Be Heard.

**I'm becoming stronger every day.** Many people ask me what I think about my scars. The faded white lines are a reminder of where I've been, but also how I've progressed to the person I am today. They are battle scars: beautiful, in a way.

**@HalleParedes2014**





**Melanie's Story** (Interviewed by Mollyhall Seely)  
Age 18, Girl Be Heard Member and Summer Intern

The most important thing to know about Melanie Thompson is not that she's a victim of sex trafficking. This is a fact about her, but only one of many that fit together into the mosaic that reads *Melanie*. There are other facts, bigger ones, brighter: Melanie Thompson is a writer, a feminist, an activist, a determined student. She wants to get a Master's Degree of Social Work from Hunter College and then work with juveniles in New York City.

"I always wanted to be a lawyer," she says, waving her fork in the air over the pancakes she's eating. "At first I wanted to be a lawyer for delinquents, but then everyone was like, 'no, they don't make money.' So I thought: okay, I'll be a corporate lawyer." She makes a face, wrinkling her nose just a little and rolling her eyes. She puts her fork down. "But corporate law, to me, was *so boring*. Like, you don't wanna [*sic*] defend Microsoft all day in court. So I was like, you know what? Social work is a perfect fit. I can be in the court, I can work with juveniles delinquents, and I can still have *this*."

"This" is Girl Be Heard's small office on 11th and Broadway. Bookshelves line the back walls. At the table next to us, women with computers quietly discuss what article to use for the theater company's next World Learning session, where members of the organization discuss women's issues on both the global and personal scales. That Girl Be Heard takes feminism and self so seriously are part of the reason why Melanie loves the company so much: "Girl Be Heard is a girl's...a *feminist* theater," she explains, self-correcting mid-sentence. "We write and perform our own work...It can be about personal issues or global issues, it's just both sides of life."

As an activist and community-oriented young woman, the combination of local and global foci seemed like the perfect fit to Melanie last summer when she first became involved with Girl Be Heard.

Their meeting could not have come at a better time, nor in a more fitting place: after giving her testimony at the Supreme Court in an effort to garner support for the Women's Protection Act, Melanie watched a group of Girl Be Heard members perform spoken word pieces on sex trafficking. Afterwards, the director approached her and encouraged her to audition. Melanie did, and won a spot in the company a week later.

"The funny thing is, I thought Girl Be Heard was like a support group," she confesses, laughing quietly. "I didn't know it was a theater. I thought it was like--a whole bunch of girls that, like, wrote poetry together. And then when I came I was exposed to all these different aspects and I was like, yeah, I can really roll with this." She grins, her face

lighting up. She seems relaxed as she talks, comfortable and confident. I am asking Melanie about her story, and she is telling it the way Girl Be Heard has taught her: with the understanding that it is important, that it has weight.

Even the painful parts of her story are told with a bald honesty that speaks simultaneously of optimism and disillusionment: terrible things happen--they have happened to Melanie--but great things happen, too.

She taps a lime-green fingernail against the table as she says, "Every time I tried to articulate something before Girl Be Heard it was never successful. It never went in my favor. Before I came here I kind of," here she shrugs, an acknowledgment of her own history, "gave up. I was like, you know what, I can't talk to anybody, no one's gonna listen to me. I kept getting raped, and I just thought, okay, it's bound to happen. That's just . . . what it is. I felt like God was targeting me. And when I came here, the first day I did my audition, they were like, you *do* have a voice. We *are* listening to everything you're saying."

It's a powerful thing, to be listened to. To be *heard*.

"They were doing things with my story," Melanie tells me, her voice rising. She leans in, lime green nails going flat against the table. She looks almost ready to push up and off, to run back to the Supreme Court right *now*. "I go to Albany *every year*. And I *met* Governor Cuomo... I can go onstage and tell my story and I feel *good* about it, because I know that there's another person out there that was the same way I was." She settles. Her voice takes on an edge. "That *is* the same way I was. And still has that doubt of 'nobody's listening.' And I can stand on that stage and say, 'Listen, *I was you*. Two years ago. And now I'm . . . this person.'"

"This person" could not be farther from the one that Melanie calls out to every time she gets up on stage. Melanie has spent every year of high school at a different school. She struggled, early on, her grades low. She was in and out of juvenile detention centers. She was angry, all the time. She felt unstable and alone. She didn't know how to make friendships outside of the life that she was trying so hard to leave behind.

"My personality's changed," she admits freely. "I have a more mature mind. I wouldn't have had that if I weren't able to tell my story, to get it out. I had all this anger inside me, which Girl Be Heard definitely helped me with."

It helps that Girl Be Heard maintains a strict policy on the grade point averages of their company members. If you want to perform and go on tour, you've got to have the grades. The work she does with Girl Be Heard is important enough to Melanie to do the work. It's important enough to commute an hour and a half both ways from Westchester to Manhattan. It's important enough for her to make plans to continue with the

organization even after she's too old to be a performer. Even if she can't stay on with Girl Be Heard, Melanie plans to get involved with other clubs and theaters doing similar work.

"I've had all these different experiences, promoting women's rights and, you know, worrying about or telling the stories of someone who can't, being like, 'I know what it's like to be in that kind of place.' ... I hope to be a part of clubs that do this even outside of Girl Be Heard. "

Melanie isn't worried about Girl Be Heard leaving the picture, though. Even if she can't stay on after she turns 21, she knows she and Girl Be Heard are connected forever. "Aside from all of the work, this is a *family*," she declares. Her voice is strong and doubtless. "Once you're a Girl Be Heard member, you're always a Girl Be Heard member...the friendships are very solid. That's what I love about these girls."

The relationships she's made within the theater company aren't just those of colleagues; they're friendships that will carry her. Everyone here has a story, and everyone else wants to hear it. The girls spend time together outside of rehearsals and workshops. They're a team.

"The first time that they found out [about my experience with sex trafficking], they were so welcoming. They just cried. I'm like, 'why are y'all crying? I'm not crying.' But it was such a . . ."

Melanie trails off. She taps her lime green nails again and looks down at her unfinished pancakes. When she glances back up, she's smiling, showing her teeth. Melanie Thompson may be writer and a performer, but now she just shrugs, letting her silence speak for her. She doesn't know what the word is for that kind of friendship. For that kind of break from the deaf ears she had become used to.

When she finds her voice again, she recalls how when she was young, her father signed her up to model. Melanie hated it, but she was good. Bold and confident, Melanie recounts with a laugh how she used to tell the kids who felt awkward that you just "do it like this!" as she struck poses.

Melanie doesn't model anymore. She'd rather write--in the library, on the train, at parties with her friends. But you get the sense that she's still that same girl when she goes on stage, reaching out to all the silent girls she used to be and showing them how to move forward, how to reclaim the story that was taken from them.

You do it like this.

**@MelanieThompson2014**

***Check out the following video links to learn more about Girl Be Heard:***

**PSA:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RssOoRG0Of8>

**Girl Be Heard Sizzle Reel:**

A sampling from Girl Be Heard's most renowned productions:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39hFuEVMe-A>

**Special Performances:**

Girl Be Heard performs "My Body," a piece about sexual exploitation in conflict zones, at the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKkCaJ4tKf8>

Girl Be Heard performs "Bring Back Our Girls" a call to action and global responsibility around the kidnapping of over 200 Nigerian School Girls in May 2014, in the U.S. Mission in Geneva.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvU5arDaLuM>

**To bring Girl Be Heard workshops, performances and teacher trainings to your school, go to [girlbeheard.org](http://girlbeheard.org) or contact [girlbeheard@girlbeheard.org](mailto:girlbeheard@girlbeheard.org).**