



# #trending

True Stories About Growing Up

*Edited by Maria Luisa Tucker*

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# Introduction

Middle school is a challenging time: students are saying goodbye to old friends and entering a new school environment; striving for peer acceptance while resisting peer pressure; juggling infatuations with family obligations. In the pages that follow, we provide a way to engage and support your youth as they navigate these obstacles.

The *#trending* Leader's Guide includes 24 lesson plans that accompany 24 true—and remarkably honest—first-person stories written by teens. The stories focus on 12 important topics, including bullying, peer pressure, stress, school success, stereotypes, and more. These are the things that are truly trending: the hot topics that take up young people's mental and emotional space, but that they may not have the words for yet. This curriculum offers them a way to have those conversations with a caring adult in a supported peer group.

While the topics will draw youth in, the real value of *#trending* is just beneath the surface. Baked into lessons are concrete strategies to bolster social and emotional learning in five key areas: self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making (more on that below). The story-based lessons work on two other important levels, as well: every single activity enhances reading comprehension, and most lessons provide opportunities for leadership with optional Community Connections Extension activities.

These fun and interactive lesson plans are designed for use in informal after-school settings, but ensure rich discussion and deep reflection. By connecting to the story and exploring it through writing and conversation, your youth will engage in social and emotional learning and Common Core-aligned literacy learning without even realizing it.

# The Youth Communication Approach

## Social and Emotional Learning

The key component of all Youth Communication’s curricula can be summed up in one phrase: social and emotional learning. SEL means figuring out how to recognize and manage our emotions, care for and empathize with others, establish positive relationships, and handle challenging situations constructively. There are certain skills, attitudes, and knowledge that go along with this. However, it’s important to emphasize the “learning” part, since SEL is an ongoing, lifetime process of understanding ourselves and others.

There are several ways this curriculum approaches SEL. First, the teen writers of our stories model social and emotional learning for readers: In their stories, they learn to manage anger, empathize with classmates who are being made fun of, and communicate effectively with parents and friends. There aren’t always happy endings—these are, after all, the real life experiences of teens—but readers will connect to their peers’ stories and absorb the lessons hidden within them.

The second way your youth will learn SEL is by watching you as you lead the group. The professional development that accompanies *#trending* will prepare you to model many of the SEL skills your youth will be learning.

Finally, your youth get opportunities to practice SEL skills in every session. Activities are explicitly structured to help them reflect on their own emotions (a key part of self-awareness), to empathize with one another and the writers of the stories (social awareness), to cooperate and manage conflict constructively (relationship skills), and to think of ways they might handle difficult emotions and situations (self-management and responsible decision making).

While most lessons touch on several areas of SEL, each lesson plan is labeled with a particular SEL focus (identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning):

**Self-awareness:** In this area, youth will work to recognize their emotions and how they influence behavior. By discovering their interests and values, they will become better able to accurately assess their strengths. They will work toward developing a well-grounded sense of self-confidence and hope for the future.

**Self-management:** Growth in this area means being better able to regulate emotions, such as managing stress, controlling impulses, and persevering through obstacles. Youth will get practice in setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.

**Social awareness:** Group members will practice looking beyond “me” and taking the perspective of and empathizing with others. Youth will work on recognizing and appreciating similarities and differences in diverse groups. They will also learn how to recognize and access resources and supports at school, home, and in the community.

**Relationship skills:** In this area, group members will develop skills needed to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation. This includes interpersonal communication skills such as active listening, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.

**Responsible decision-making:** Youth will work on considering ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and the likely consequences of various courses of action. Young people will become more motivated to make positive contributions and to make decisions that support the well-being of themselves and others.

## Literacy Development to Engage All Readers

At the center of every Youth Communication lesson is a facilitated group reading of a true story written by a teen in our New York City program. Reading the stories aloud provides a literacy-boosting experience for everyone, including struggling readers and English Language Learners, who become engaged in reading because the peer-written stories feel so relevant to them.

We emphasize reading aloud because it is a developmentally appropriate and research-backed strategy that promotes both reading comprehension and connections among peers—two important components to this work. It ensures that *everyone* can access the text equally and engage with it at their thinking level, not just their reading level. This fosters a supportive community experience of the story, which in turn helps group members connect with one another and the text.

To facilitate a successful read-aloud:

- Ask the group to sit in a circle.
- Start the reading yourself and jump in to volunteer if needed. Your fluent and dramatic reading will model for the class and help them stay connected to the story.
- Go around the circle, giving everyone a chance to read as much or as little as they would like. Students may pass.
- Talk with your most reluctant readers outside of the session. Encourage them to volunteer to read. Alternatively, give them a small task to be responsible for, such as reading the story title and teen writer's name aloud at the beginning, which will allow them to participate and build confidence.

Reading aloud is central, but it's not all. We have intentionally designed each lesson, from beginning to end, to further bolster literacy development: Pre-reading activities activate background knowledge and set the emotional tone for the story. In the "Read and Discuss the Story" section of the lessons, we provide open-ended questions for the leader to ask at intervals during the reading, which encourage active reading as participants make connections, question, predict, infer, and share multiple perspectives. Post-reading activities encourage group members to make personal connections to the story, build their understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

Underneath all these strategies is one last, important piece: you. As a leader, you must ensure a safe and supportive space in which all readers can grow their confidence. This is easier than it sounds. By simply participating in the group, you model a positive readerly identity. And, as you'll see in our story "What's Wrong With Reading?" simply modeling—and repeating—the idea that reading is good is an important job for any youth worker.

## Connecting to the Common Core

Lessons in this guide help learners develop many of the literacy skills identified in the Common Core learning standards. Using informational text, we engage readers and help them grow toward proficiency. The lessons do this through speaking and listening, written expression, and reading comprehension strategies.

In creating these lessons, we've kept in mind that your group will likely comprise diverse learners who may require differentiated instruction across blended ages and skills—and we have offered ways to meet group members where they're at. At the same time, we want to build toward high school readiness, so we have aligned our instructional strategies to support 9<sup>th</sup> grade benchmarks.

Teens participating fully in the group should demonstrate growth towards the standards listed on page 228.

# How to Use This Leader’s Guide

This guide includes 24 lesson plans that take approximately 50 minutes each. We’ve organized lessons around each chapter of the *#trending* anthology, but you need not stick to that order. Lessons can be used on their own, and you can use 2, 12, or all 24 of them—whatever suits the needs of your program.

However, to get the most out of *#trending*, you should follow lesson plans closely. Each lesson plan has an intentional flow that will boost literacy and SEL. We include specific directions on how to prepare for the session and smooth transitions between each activity.

## Preparing for the Session

Everything in the top shaded portion of the lesson is just for you and should not be presented to the group (this includes the chapter title, session title, SEL focus, story summary, story to use, learning objectives, materials, and preparation sections).

Take particular notice of the **SEL Focus**, which is in all caps under the lesson title. This can act as a guide if you want to work on specific SEL areas with your group. (For example, if you want to have the group work on communicating more effectively, you may wish to start with a lesson plan that has “relationship skills” as the SEL focus.)

The **Learning Objectives** section outlines specific outcomes that group members will work toward in both the SEL and literacy domains. Those that target literacy are aligned with the language and ideas of the Common Core Standards.

In the **Materials** section, we provide a list of everything you’ll need for the session. If some of these materials aren’t available to you, you may make substitutions. For example, if you don’t have chart paper, you may write what is required on a whiteboard instead. You should keep your group set of *#trending* anthologies organized and on site to ensure every group member has their own book during the session.

Make sure to read the **Preparation** section and to give yourself enough time to read the story, prep materials, make copies of any handouts, and do the reflection required for certain activities. Anything you’re supposed to write on chart paper ahead of time will be in bold face within the lesson plan. You should always read the story ahead of time and select at least five of the provided discussion questions to ask. Reading the story in advance shouldn’t be rushed; it’s an important part of getting ready because it gives you an opportunity to think about your own emotional responses and to anticipate how your group will respond. This will help you be a responsive and effective leader.

## During the Lesson

Each lesson has four parts: an Opening Activity, Read and Discuss the Story, Explore the Ideas Activity, and Closing Circle. All lessons also have a final, optional activity called Community Connections Extension.

**Opening Activity:** Prompts and questions draw on group members’ personal experiences and background knowledge as a way to set the emotional tone for the story the group is about to read.

We encourage you to ask yourself any questions posed in the opening activity, which will help you remember your own experiences as a teen. Whether or not you share your personal experience with the group, simply remembering that time of life and thinking about the themes from that perspective will help you connect to the story and the group.

**Read and Discuss the Story:** The most important work of the lesson happens here. Reading aloud and then discussing the story within the circle is a safe way to explore complex or difficult thoughts, feelings, and experiences that arise. This is why it is essential that you ask at least some of the read-aloud discussion questions within the story. (However, if a discussion starts to veer too far afield, guide the group back by saying, “Let’s return to the story and see what happens next/see what the writer has to say.”) Reading them to yourself in advance and anticipating your group members’ responses can make the discussion seem more natural and less like a structured school-day lesson.

**Explore the Ideas Activity:** In these post-reading activities, group members will build their understanding of the story while rehearsing positive behaviors. Students reflect on what they read through writing, drawing, or performance while identifying and exploring the social and emotional learning skills exhibited by the teen writer. During these activities, group members also extend their literacy learning through written expression or speaking and listening.

**Closing Circle:** To wrap up and check for the group’s understanding, this go-round share asks the group to respond to two prompts. The first asks each group member to identify what interested them most about the story and the session’s activities. The second prompt comes from an empowering place of “I”, targets a key learning objective, and highlights the SEL focus of the story. It helps to think of this question as the “last word” in the room. Listening carefully to the responses to this second question can give you invaluable information about your group members as learners and as people.

**Community Connections Extension:** A suggested activity for further exploration is included in most lesson plans. If you want to build your group’s leadership skills, you may offer the inquiry question in this section as a jumping-off point for extending the learning experience to the group’s schools, neighborhoods, and larger communities.

## Bonus Stories and Open-Ended Questions

In addition to the 24 stories with lessons, there are 12 other bonus stories (one at the end of each chapter) that can be read and discussed using open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions invite youth to think about how the themes, emotions, and choices made in the story relate to their own lives. They have no right or wrong answer, and cannot be answered with a simple “yes or “no.” Rather, a good open-ended question asks group members to share their thoughts, assures that different perspectives are welcome, and maintains that all experiences and ideas are valued. By being non-judgmental in tone, effective questions support intellectual risk-taking as youth try out ideas.

Here are some examples of effective open-ended questions that may be used with any of our bonus stories:

- What main problem or challenge is the writer facing?
- What choices does the writer have in trying to deal with the problem?
- What do you predict is going to happen next?
- What strengths, skills, or resources could the teen use to address the challenge?

- If you were in the writer's shoes, what would you do?
- What connections can you make to the story (text-to-self, text-to-text, text-to-world)?
- Do you disagree or agree with the writer's actions? Why?
- What advice would you give the writer right now?
- What could the adults in the story be doing better to help this young person?
- What have you learned by reading this story that you didn't know before?
- What, if anything, will you do differently after reading this story?

# Leading a Youth Communication Group

## Getting Started

Creating a safe, welcoming space is a necessity for any meaningful discussion with young people. As a group leader, it's up to you to nurture that atmosphere into existence.

On the first day, begin by welcoming group members and introducing yourself. Have the group sit in a circle to establish that norm from the beginning. Have group members introduce themselves. You may ask them to share something about themselves they'd like the group to know (or facilitate a cooperative group game you've been successful with in the past). Then, introduce the purpose of the group. You might say:

“This group will be discussing and working together with stories from a book called *#trending*. These true stories were written by teens about things that they struggled with, such as family relationships, friendships, anger, conflict, and dealing with stereotypes. We will read and talk about the stories, do some activities that will help us understand them better, and think about the ways the stories connect with our own lives, feelings, and experiences.”

Next, explain that you want to create a safe space where everyone feels like they belong and differences are respected. Most young people will understand and agree that this is important. We recommend you create group agreements together.

While it should be up to the group members to come up with the agreements, the guidelines below have been helpful for groups like yours:

- Include everyone and work together
- Ask for help when you need it and offer help when others do
- One “mic”: listen to each other without interrupting
- Be fully present and participate
- Challenge the idea, not the person
- Put ups, not put downs
- Laugh and celebrate

Your group agreements are a living document. Write them up on chart paper and post them somewhere everyone can see. Revisit them regularly and ask group members:

- Are the agreements working?
- Does everyone feel safe, included, and productive?
- Are there additions or changes we should make?

## Being an Effective Leader

To facilitate a Youth Communication group effectively, you must be prepared, establish consistent and predictable routines, keep the story at the center of the learning, focus on strengths, and make space for youth voice.

**Be prepared:**

- Read the story ahead of time to reflect on your own emotional response and to anticipate how the group may respond.
- Talk to a colleague about any hot-button issues you think could come up and strategize your approach.
- Gather all materials and prepare any chart papers ahead of time.
- Think through transitions between activities. The lesson plan is written to guide your facilitation, so pay close attention to the rhythm and flow. To help with this, you can easily create and post an agenda for each session based on the plan.

**Establish consistent, predictable routines:**

- Sit in a circle as much as possible, and always for the story read-aloud and closing circle. In a circle, everyone is included and everyone has equal voice (including the leader). It is easier to be present and listen actively when everyone can make eye contact with one another.
- Keep an eye on time. Lessons are designed to provide enough time to engage in the work while keeping things moving and reaching closure at the end.
- Follow the lesson plan. It was designed to help you be effective and your session successful.

**Keep the story at the center of the learning:**

- For most group members it will be easier to talk about the writer than to talk about themselves. That's OK: They are still doing important personal reflection and learning even if not speaking from "I."
- Never skip the story read-aloud. If you have to cut an activity because of time, we strongly recommend you cut the Explore the Ideas Activity and keep the Opening Activity, Read and Discuss the Story, and Closing Circle.

**Focus on strengths:**

- Listen for, name, and honor strengths. Many young people are very aware of their deficits. Be the kind of caring adult who acknowledges their assets.
- Model a positive readerly and writerly identity by writing during a freewrite or journal time and reading aloud with the group. This shores up their own confidence as developing readers and writers.

**Make space for youth voice:**

- Support peer-to-peer dialogue. Don't feel that you have to be the expert on any topic. There is so much diverse wisdom in the group; draw it out and build it up.
- Practice active listening by paying attention to both your verbal and nonverbal communication (mirror back what you heard, don't interrupt, etc.). Remember, you are modeling the kind of positive interpersonal communication you want group members to practice.
- Practice non-judgmental communication at all times. It is OK to call out a behavior as unsafe or disrespectful, but it is never OK to make a teen feel judged as a person because of a poor decision or situation they shared in the group. Nurturing a non-judgmental space is a guaranteed way to get young people to open up.

# Community Membership and Leadership

Youth Communication groups provide opportunities for youth to learn what it means to be a good community member. By contributing to and upholding group agreements, young people are moving beyond “me” and considering the needs of others. When participating in a closing circle or read aloud, they are managing their impulses, actively listening to their peers, and practicing empathy as they hear their peers’ thoughts and feelings. Many of our activities, like role plays and pair shares, provide a structure and practice to work together. All those things build toward the leadership skills that are most directly tied to academic and work success: cooperating with others, being self-aware, recognizing others’ needs.

You can further integrate leadership opportunities by inviting group members to take on certain responsibilities, such as:

- Reading aloud the group agreements, as a reminder, at the beginning of each session
- Introducing the story by reading the introductory statement in the lesson plan
- Handing out, gathering, and organizing materials for writing and drawing
- Acting as the “librarian” for your group set of anthologies: handing out books at the beginning of each session and collecting them at the end
- Being an ambassador for the group by greeting guests and welcoming new members

Additionally, the optional Community Connections Extension at the end of most lesson plans provides opportunities for group members to practice leadership outside of the group.

# Exploring Identity

## The Mirror and Its Many Reflections

### SELF-AWARENESS/SOCIAL AWARENESS

#### Story to Use: “The Identity Experiment” by Lily Mai

**Story Summary:** Lily is curious about how others will see her and how she will see herself if she wears different styles of clothing. Through her experiment, she discovers that there are certain ways she likes to see herself and other ways that she doesn't. Ultimately, she has a better idea of who she is, but realizes she isn't limited to one way of dressing or being.

#### Learning Objectives

Youth will build their SEL by:

- Reflecting on their sense of self and identity
- Listening to and taking the perspective of others from diverse backgrounds

Youth will increase their literacy by:

- Making meaning of text through group read-aloud and discussion

#### Materials

Two signs for opinion continuum (“agree” and “disagree”)  
Chart paper, markers  
Drawing paper, colored pencils

#### Preparation

- Read the story ahead of time and identify the questions you want to ask.
- Before leading the opinion continuum activity, clear a large open space in the center of the room.
- Post “agree” and “disagree” signs at either end of the room.
- Create “Three Mirrors” example to model the draw it activity.

### OPENING ACTIVITY — OPINION CONTINUUM (8 minutes)

This pre-reading activity will activate background knowledge to boost reading comprehension and set the emotional tone for the story.

1. After welcoming the group, point out the two signs that are posted at opposite ends of the room. Explain that they will be doing an activity that will allow them to move around while learning more about what they and their peers think about a topic.
2. While the group is still seated, review the directions. Explain that you will read a statement and ask group members to move to the sign that expresses their opinion. Once everyone has moved, you will invite volunteers to share why they chose to stand where they are. Remind the group that the goal is to listen to one another, not to persuade or debate, and that every opinion is valid.
3. Next, ask the group to stand up and move to the center of the open space you prepared.
4. Read the first statement and ask group members to move anywhere in between the two signs:
  - **It's OK for someone's style or look to change from year to year.**
5. Once all group members have moved in response to a statement, ask them to notice where other group members are standing. (You can support minority positions by moving closer to someone who is alone at one end of the continuum.)

6. Ask for volunteers to share why they are standing where they are. Tell group members they may change their position if they are influenced by another group member's perspective.
7. Repeat for each statement:
  - **It's OK for someone's style or look to change from month to month.**
  - **It's OK to try out a different style or look to get attention from others.**
  - **If you wear black lipstick or all black clothing, you should expect people to stare at you.**
  - **People who often change their style are considered "fake" or posers.**
  - **Clothes, hairstyles, and makeup are the best way to show the world who you are.**
  - **The way people see themselves and the way others see them aren't always the same.**
8. Thank group members for sharing their opinions.

### **READ AND DISCUSS THE STORY (20 minutes)**

By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, group members build comprehension and support fluency.

1. Introduce the story: Explain to the group that they are going to read a story by a young woman who experiments with her appearance to figure out if it changes the way others perceive her or how she perceives herself.
2. Set expectations for reading the story: Sitting in a circle, group members take turns reading aloud. They should be given the option of passing when it's their turn.



**Tell the group to turn to p. 17 in their anthologies. (See the Leader's version in this binder for stories with discussion questions included.)**

3. Read and discuss the story together: As group leader, you should pause the reading when you arrive at an open-ended question within the text (in **boldface** brackets). Ask the group this question and facilitate a short discussion before returning to the text.

### **EXPLORE THE IDEAS ACTIVITY — DRAW IT (15 minutes)**

During this post-reading activity group members will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

1. Introduce the drawing activity by saying to the group: "Now that we've read the story, we are going to draw three kinds of mirrors that show how we see ourselves, how others see us, and how we *want* others to see us."
2. Provide a model for your students by drawing your own mirrors on a large piece of chart paper. Label each mirror ("How I See Myself," "How Others See Me," and "How I Want Others to See Me") and include details in each about your dress, style, and facial expression. You can also include words or symbols. Briefly discuss how your mirrors are similar and/or different from one another.

3. Offer suggestions for what group members may include in their mirror portraits (details about clothing, makeup, facial expression and/or words and symbols), but allow them to come up with their own ideas of what they wish to include.
4. Hand out drawing paper and markers/colored pencils.
5. Give group members 10 minutes to complete their drawings. (Move around the room offering support and encouragement.)
6. Once group members have completed their mirror drawings, ask them to circle the mirror that they feel is closest to the real version of who they are. Ask them to consider why.
7. Time permitting, ask for one or two volunteers to share out about their mirror drawings.
8. Thank these volunteers for sharing.

### **CLOSING CIRCLE (7 minutes)**

In closing circle, group members make personal connections to the story and share their take-aways with each other.

Guide group members in a go-round share of responses to these prompts:

1. “What stood out for you in Lily Mai’s story, ‘The Identity Experiment,’ and our activities for today?”
2. Finish this sentence: “When I look in the mirror, I want to see someone who...”

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### **OPTIONAL: COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS EXTENSION**

If you choose to extend the learning beyond the session, you can use this inquiry question to design an activity to engage group members in community and global issues.

*What would happen if I performed my own “identity experiment”?*

For further exploration, ask group members to change their clothing style or appearance for one day—it can be a small or big change. Have them keep a log and take notes on how they feel about their appearance, how others respond to these changes in their appearance and how they wish others (both strangers and friends) saw them when they are dressed this way.

# The Identity Experiment

By Lily Mai

One morning last month, I curled my hair and tied a bit of it back to show my face. I also wore eyeliner and my mother's black shoes with heels and tight jeans. When I got to school, a classmate looked me up and down with a "what's the occasion?" look. Before I knew it, the whole class was saying things like, "Are you doing something special after school?" and, "Do you have a date?" **[Why do you think Lily's classmates are responding this way?]**

I just blushed and looked away. I didn't want to be the center of the attention. I knew I looked good, but to me it wasn't something to talk or brag about. It was more of an inside kind of feeling for me, a confidence that I'd longed to feel for a while.

Even though the attention was a little uncomfortable, I was happily amazed by all the compliments I got that day. All I'd done was add eye makeup and wear tight jeans, and I felt completely different. And other people saw me completely differently, too.

I wondered, "How much does our appearance affect how people perceive us and how we feel about ourselves?" If I got this big a reaction from a little eye shadow, what if I looked completely different? Would people react differently? Would I feel different?

I decided to do an experiment to figure out just how much our appearance can shape how we think of ourselves. I would try out different identities on different days—goth, party girl, hip-hop, and my normal look—to see if people would react differently. **[What do you think is going to happen during Lily's experiment?]**

The next day, a friend who wears goth clothing helped me dress like her. I wore a black lace collar, black Converse sneakers, black pants with gold zippers everywhere, a spiked belt and silver chains wrapped around my hips. I also wore three huge necklaces, including a heavy back cross on a chain. I drew a black star on the bottom of my left eye to enhance the dark look.

When I looked at myself in the mirror, I saw myself as the same person, just wearing a different outfit. I didn't feel different until I was out in public. As I walked along the street, a middle-aged guy looked at me. After we crossed paths, he turned his head and continued to stare. I knew from his eyes that he

wasn't looking at me because I was beautiful, but because I looked different. **[Has anyone ever looked at you or someone you know in this way? How would you describe that look? How does it feel to be looked at in that way?]**

More heads turned as I continued down the street. Their stares seemed to say I wasn't like them and I didn't belong in this society. I was starting to hate being dressed like this. After being stared at and even laughed at on the train home, my stomach felt queasy and I was crying inside. I wanted to get out of this outfit immediately.

I have friends who are goth and they tell me they don't care at all when people stare. Their attitude is "screw what everyone thinks—normal people suck." I think these friends dress goth because it's a reflection of who they are, but I hated people's mean reactions. This was not an identity I'd try again. **[Why might the goths feel this way but not Lily? Who do you agree with?]**

For my next outfit, I went for a party girl look. I put on makeup and dressed in a green top, a short gauzy black miniskirt, and heeled ankle boots. I felt more naked than I'd ever felt in my entire life. Walking to the subway was embarrassing and I wanted to walk faster to get away, but I couldn't. Not in these shoes.

I felt everyone's eyes on my bare legs. I got some comments from guys on the street that made me feel complimented—and some that made me feel uncomfortable and self-conscious. As the day went on, I found that I didn't like the attention after all. I couldn't wait to get home and change into a pair of jeans.

For my hip-hop outfit, I wore a borrowed basketball jersey and a flat-brimmed baseball cap. I felt miserable because I thought I looked boyish and fake.

When I walked the same streets as I had in all my other outfits, people's eyes clung to my face and some girls gave me this weird "who is she trying to be, dressing that way" look. When I was in the deli, a teenage girl looked at me up and down and breathed in my entire outfit. I could tell she thought I was trying too hard to fit in and that made me angry because I would never wear something that's not me just to fit in. **[Do you think the girls would have responded this way if Lily had been a boy in this outfit?]**

At the end of the day, there was nothing I liked about my hip-hop outfit. I didn't look or feel pretty. The shirt was too long, the cap was huge on my small head, and the entire look was way out of my league. I'd never wear it again.

It was a relief to dress as my regular self the next day. I wore a plain black T-shirt and jeans, with no makeup or accessories. I liked the simplicity of the outfit. I felt relaxed, like this was the real me. The quiet, innocent me.

This experience confirmed my idea that we're judged immediately by what we wear. Our clothes are windows into our identities. When strangers see us, they make assumptions about who we are based on our appearance, and they react accordingly. **[What do you think matters more: how others see Lily or how she sees herself? Why?]**

I also learned how much my feelings about myself are based on other people's reactions. In the goth outfit, I didn't feel one bit different until I went outside. When people started staring, it really hurt and made me want to take off the outfit right away.

And when I wore the short skirt, I felt flattered by some of the compliments I got. I'd never thought I was pretty, but those reactions gave me a little hope that I might not be bad looking after all. At the same time, when men looked me up and down, I felt naked and uncomfortable. **[When is attention flattering? When is it uncomfortable?]**

When I look in the mirror, I want to see myself in what I wear, and I want other people to see who I am. This experiment gave me a better idea of who that is. I found that I was afraid to wear outfits like goth and hip-hop, but I was excited about wearing the girly outfits. Maybe I'm more of a girly girl than I'd thought.

I never admitted that to myself before because I didn't want to be one of those girls who has to buy the latest trends and cries when she breaks a nail. But I actually like wearing girly clothes and a little makeup, and I like getting compliments (as long as they're from guys my age).

I like feeling comfortable too, though. For now, I'll probably keep my same look and just wear a little eye makeup occasionally, and maybe even a skirt. One that covers my legs though—I've already returned the miniskirt. **[Did Lily's experiment go the way you thought it would? Would you ever try an experiment like this? Why or why not?]**

*Lily was 17 when she wrote this story.  
After high school, she went to Brooklyn College.*