Lesson: Identity: Defining Self, Choosing Friends

OVERVIEW
In this lesson, students explore the factors that influence self-identity, which frequently evolves as adolescents negotiate life’s circumstances to find and secure their places in the world.

The video clips provided with this lesson are from Only the Young, a film that follows three unconventional Christian teenagers coming of age in a small Southern California town. Skateboarders Garrison and Kevin and Garrison’s on-and-off girlfriend, Skye, wrestle with the eternal questions of youth: friendship, true love and the promise of the future. Yet their lives are also touched by the distress signals of contemporary America—foreclosed homes, abandoned businesses and adults in financial trouble. As graduation approaches, these issues become shocking realities.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network.

OBJECTIVES
By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Describe the factors that shape and shift self-identity
- Become aware of how self-identity influences life choices, particularly in friendships
- Recognize how choices and perspectives fluctuate as priorities, experiences, decisions and other items change, especially during adolescence

GRADE LEVELS
9-12

SUBJECT AREAS
Language Arts, Social Studies, Current Events

MATERIALS
- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video
- Chart paper and markers

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED
One 50-minute class period, plus 30 to 50 minutes for the homework assignment
FILM CLIPS

Clip 1: Breaking Up (Length: 3:42)
This clip begins at 14:18 with a view of a bus and a person putting something in the luggage compartment. In the background, Garrison says, “Uh, I broke up with my girlfriend.” It ends at 18:00 with a view of Garrison sitting on rocks, his bike leaning against the rocks. He says, “And I guess I see what happens.”

Clip 2: Friends (Length: 2:15)
The clip begins at 21:15 with a quick view of Garrison and Kevin in front of a small house, and then Garrison on a couch in a costume, saying, “Skye, she got kind of wasted.” It ends at 23:30 with a view of Kevin and Garrison standing behind carnival cutout figures as Garrison says, “Things are a little different.”

Clip 3: Facebook Mom (Length: 2:27)
The clip begins at 27:26 with a view of a window on Skye’s house and with Skye saying, “Well, I was on Facebook.” It ends at 29:53, with a view of Skye wearing a hat as Skye says, “I’ll live without her.”

Clip 4: A New Car (Length: 1:13)
The clip begins at 40:14 with a view of the valley as Garrison says, “All right, so I just got my first car.” It ends at 41:27 with a view of Garrison and his girlfriend near the lake. Garrison says, “I could drive us to the Bahamas.”

Clip 5: Like Fungus and Rust (Length: 1:27)
This clip begins at 55:46, with a view of the sky and Garrison saying, “Well, I really wanted…” It ends at 57:13 with a view of Garrison and Keith on a tin roof and Garrison saying, “Yeah, I’m down.”

ACTIVITY

1. Distribute a sheet of chart paper and a marker to each student. Tell each student to draw a frame or something similar that holds a “mirror.” Instruct students to look in the “mirrors” and list what they “see” in themselves that makes them unique—interests, friendships, social connections, school, work, beliefs, racial and sexual identity and so on, and also to note how they believe others see them. Students should list these qualities on the “mirrors.”

2. Invite volunteers to share their perceptions. (NOTE: Sharing personal descriptions of self might be daunting. Remind students to be respectful of each other. Or, have students draw up guidelines for interacting with and responding to each other during this sharing.) Ask the class to remark on what they view as the factors that influence how young people see themselves.

3. Briefly introduce the concept of self-identity to students and have them define the term, drawing on the descriptions they and their peers shared. Several key concepts useful for this discussion can be found on these two website pages:

   • Learnet: What Is Sense of Self?
   • Campuspeak: Finding Your Self Identity in College
4. Distribute the graphic organizer **Self-Identity: Factors and Impact**. Work with the class to create categories that influence self-identity, drawing on the categories students named earlier, along with elements noted in the key concepts. Ask students if there are other elements that they believe influence self-identity and instruct them to add those to their charts.

5. Briefly describe the film **Only the Young**. Explain that it features young people negotiating friendships, relationships, family, spirituality and their futures—all aspects of the formation and evolving state of self-identity.

6. Show students the following brief clips one at a time: Clip 1: (Length: 3:42); Clip 2: (Length: 2:15); Clip 3: (Length: 2:27); Clip 4: (Length: 1:13); and Clip 5: (Length: 1:27). After showing each clip, ask the students to fill in the graphic organizer, matching examples from the film to existing categories and adding new categories that emerge. After they view all of the clips, pose the following discussion questions:

- What are some of the issues the subjects are negotiating that influence their self-identities and the way they interact with friends, family and partners?
- How is the value of friendship portrayed?
- What changes do you see in the subjects, even in these short clips? What do these changes indicate about the impact of life events on the formation of self-identity?

7. Divide students into small groups. Distribute two sheets of chart paper and markers to each group. Have each group select a recorder. Ask:

- In what ways do you relate to these people?
- If you have/have had similar situations, conflicts and relationships, do you/did you approach them as the subjects of the film do? If not, how did you handle them?

Each group then discusses the questions and decides on a set of tips related to the issues to offer peers. The recorder writes these down. Each group shares its tips.

8. **OPTIONAL (if time permits):** Have students explore other challenges/circumstances in young people’s lives to examine other factors that influence self-identity. They can:

- View the video **All Things Can Change** (http://wideanglemedia.org/tag/youth-identity/). In this short, autobiographical film, Malcom Barton, Jr. investigates the tendency among young people to make self-destructive decisions by exploring his own story.
- Read or listen to portions or all of “**Facing Identity Conflicts, Black Students Fall Behind**” (http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=114327591) on identity issues specific to middle-class black and Latino teenagers.

Students can add rows for race, class, financial status and other factors to their graphic organizers, then fill in the details as they did earlier. After they have done so, discuss how these factors influence self-identity, based on the materials viewed or read and their own observations.
HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Ask students to reflect on their lives to determine what currently wields the greatest influence on their self-identities and how these elements might play out in the future, after they are done with high school. Students can write their thoughts in various formats, including short poems, monologues and essays, then share their work in class.

EXTENSIONS

1. Each adult in the film, whether a family member or a mentor, influences the young-adult subjects significantly. Arrange the students in small groups and have them reflect on and discuss the roles specific individuals play in their lives, comparing and contrasting their respective experiences using the graphic organizer Compare and Contrast Relationships with Adults. Students first complete the document individually and then share their responses with their groups. Each group then determines the aspects of adult relationships that have the strongest and longest-lasting impact (positive and/or negative) on young people.

2. Students in high school, especially seniors, are starting to plan their futures. This is seen in the film, as the featured young people reflect on what they will do after they graduate. Invite students to share what they plan to do once they leave high school and to consider what might alter those plans as they begin and continue their journeys toward their futures. Assign students to create timelines that reflect their plans over the next year and the possible choices they may make along the way.

3. Assign students to explore the history, evolution and current popularity of skateboarding and discuss the youth culture associated with skateboarding. As they read and view materials, ask them to keep in mind the questions of what has influenced skateboarding over the years and how it attracts young people. Also, ask students to put forth ideas about how skateboarding will look in 10 or more years, considering how they believe it will evolve and how and why it will or will not continue to attract young people. Below are some useful websites they can use to jumpstart that exploration:

- **Scholastic: Going Green: Action Sports Using Natural Resources**
  http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/Skateboarding/articles/index.asp?article=green&topic=0
- **Exploratorium: Skateboard Science**
  http://www.exploratorium.edu/skateboarding/skatedesign_changesovertim.html
- **The Sport Journal: An Ethnographic Study of the Skateboarding Culture**
  http://www.thesportjournal.org/article/ethnographic-study-skateboarding-culture
- **A Skateboarder’s Perception**
  http://www.hellskate.com/a-skateboarders-perception-by-german-torres
- **Skate Perception: Self-representation, Identity and Visual Style in a Youth Subculture**
  http://www.academia.edu/679738/Skate_perception_self-representation_identity_and_visual_style_in_a_youth_subculture

RESOURCES

- **Act for Youth Center of Excellence: Adolescent Identity Development**
  http://www.actforyouth.net/health_sexuality/adolescence/identity/

- **Facing History and Ourselves: Biopoem: Connecting Identity and Poetry**
  http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/strategies/biopoem-connecting-identity-p
Frontline: Inside the Teenage Brain
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/

The Global Conversation: Confessions of a Self-Centered Teen
http://www.theglobalconversation.com/blog/?p=3874

PBS Parents: Understanding and Raising Girls
http://www.pbs.org/parents/raisinggirls/girlslife/

POV: Off and Running
http://www.pbs.org/pov/offandrunning/#.UYgMZoIp0Wk

Psychology Today: All About Adolescence
http://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/adolescence

UCLA Newsroom: Teens Maintain Their Religion as Part of Their Identity During Turbulent High School Years
http://newsroom.ucla.edu/portal/ucla/teens-maintain-their-religion-208066.aspx

University of Missouri News Bureau: Teens Tell Different Tales About Themselves Depending on Gender, Says MU Researcher
http://munews.missouri.edu/news-releases/2012/0905-teens-tell-different-tales-about-themselves-depending-on-gender-says-mu-researcher/

What Do You Believe?
http://www.whatdoyoubelieve.org/

Wide Angle Youth Media
http://wideanglemedia.org/tag/youth-identity/

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects
(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

**SL.9-10.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**SL.11-12.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**SL.9-10.2** Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

**SL.11-12.2** Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

**W.9-10.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.
**W.11-12.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

**RI.9-10.7** Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

**RI.11-12.3** Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

**RI.11-12.7** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**Content Knowledge:** [http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/](http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Language Arts, Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

Behavioral Studies, Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity and behavior.

Behavioral Studies, Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups and institutions.

Family/Consumer Sciences, Family Life, Standard 1: Understand the family as the basic unit of society.

Family/Consumer Sciences, Family Life, Standard 2: Understand the impact of family on the well-being of individuals and society.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Michele Israel owns Michele Israel Educational Writing & Consulting (www.micheleisrael.com), where she works with large and small educational, nonprofit and media organizations to bolster products and programs. Her rich career spans more than 25 years of successful experience developing educational materials and resources, designing and facilitating training, generating communication materials and grant proposals and assisting in organizational and program development. Her long list of clients includes the Public Broadcasting Service, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, WETA Television, Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, the Harm Reduction Coalition and the New York City Charter School Center.
### Self-Identity: Factors and Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-identity factors</th>
<th>Influence (examples of how these factors influence self-identity)</th>
<th>Cause of change (indicate how these factors influence various aspects of life, such as friendships, family and school)</th>
<th>Effect (the result of these changes)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example:</strong> Social relationships</td>
<td>The way I choose my friends—we share similar values and interests</td>
<td>My friends do something that I don’t like or they have changed their interests</td>
<td>I become less friendly with these people, or choose to hang out with them in a different setting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compare and Contrast Relationships with Adults

In each box, identify two adults with whom you have unique relationship. Briefly describe the relationship (e.g., father, teacher, grandparent, etc.), along with its impact on your life. Complete the sections following to compare and contrast the relationships. Share with your group.

Adult 1 __________________________

Adult 2 __________________________

How are they alike?

How are they different?

How are they alike?

How are they different?