

AMERICAN TEENS TALK!



American Teens Talk!

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Introduction

In the summer of 2009, I had a wonderful opportunity to spend three weeks with a group of Tajik English teachers. One of the teachers said that her students would like to have a book of stories about American teenagers. When I returned home, I couldn't find a book like that, so I began to interview ordinary young people about their everyday lives and send the interviews to some English teachers and learners. When I asked teenagers for an interview, they almost always said, "But I don't do anything special." I told them, "That's exactly what I want: ordinary life and ordinary English."

When the U.S. State Department's Office of English Language Programs decided to publish this little book, they asked for sound recordings and pictures of the teens. Sometimes I could get a picture and a sound recording from the young person I interviewed in the past. Sometimes I couldn't. I needed a parent's permission to use a photo or record a voice, and sometimes parents asked me not to use the student's real name. Some of the boys were older now and their voices had changed. As a result, sometimes the interview, photo, and voice are all from the same person, and sometimes they are from two, three, or four different people. However, in every case, these are real interviews with real kids about their real lives. No professional models, actors, or readers helped with this project. This is ordinary English from ordinary kids talking about their ordinary lives.

There are several people who deserve special thanks. First, the young people who helped with the project. Second, Robert Kirk, of Treehouse Mobile Studio in North Carolina (treehousemobile.com), who recorded all the interviews. Third, Scott Bennett, a teacher who encouraged some of his speech students to read for the recordings. Fourth, my wonderful husband Will, who helped in every way he could.

I hope that this will be an interesting way for you to practice reading and speaking English and that you will enjoy learning a little bit more about America and American life. In one of the interviews, a young man says, "We're probably not that different from you." I think he's probably right.

Wishing you success in your studies and a very bright future,

Nancy Ackles

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Bianca, 17

Bianca asked for extra time to think about what she would like to say to kids in other countries, but on the day we made the recording, she knew exactly what she wanted to say.

What have you been doing this week?

Well, this week I started with having a day off on Monday, but I've been doing a lot of calculus homework the entire week. I was lucky enough to go to a conference today, on women's philanthropy,* and I was so excited to meet a lot of people who are involved in supporting many philanthropies which deal with feeding the hungry in my area.

Why did you get to go to the conference?

I got to go to the conference because I am on the service council at my school, and I was one of the ten in the county* who was invited. I was able to meet Barbara Bush's* granddaughter, and she was speaking about her charity that she has had for about ten years, which is called FEED, which basically feeds hungry children in America as well as around the world.

What does the service council do?

What the service council does is try to get my school united in doing service projects or raising money for local food banks.* We also put together Christmas care packages* for abused as well as neglected children.

What did you do for the Labor Day holiday?

For the Labor Day* holiday, I was doing a lot of studying to get ready for my calculus and Spanish class. But we also had a barbecue* for dinner and we ate as a family, which is something we always do on holidays and long weekends.

Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

My parents came to America from India, and they met in college. My grandmother is Portuguese, and I am very close to her. I also have a younger sister, named Capri, and she is fifteen years old.

Does your family have any special traditions?

Yes, we have lots of special traditions, and they are really all important to me. I grew up cooking with my grandmother and my mother, so baking cookies for Christmas is a huge tradition. We love Italian food, grilled chicken, and salads.

What do you want to do after high school?

I would love to go to college and pursue my passions for Spanish, history, and business.

Do you have an idea of a career you'd like to follow?

I would love to somehow bring all of these passions together by doing a type of corporate job, but I'm not really quite sure yet.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

I'm so excited to be able to talk to you guys* and to share part of my culture with you guys. I hope one day to travel to your countries and to learn a little bit more about how small the world really is.

A Few Words

Philanthropy: Here this means an organization that gives money to help poor people.

County: Each state in the United States is divided into smaller areas called counties.

Barbara Bush: The wife of George Bush Sr., President of the United States, 1989–1993.

Food bank: A place where poor people can get free food for their families.

Care packages: Gift boxes with food treats and useful items for people who are away from home. These children are probably living with special families because their own families do not take good care of them.

Labor Day: This holiday honors workers and is always on the first Monday in September.

Barbecue: Cooking food outside over a charcoal fire.

You guys: An informal phrase that is used when speaking to other people, either men or women.

Discussion Questions

1. Bianca met a member of a famous family. Which famous person would you like to meet? Why?
2. Do students in your school do service projects together? What are they? Do you do service projects through other organizations?



Max, 15

What have you been doing this week?

Oh well, let's see, this has been a different week than usual. Last Friday my school orchestra went to Atlanta, Georgia, where we went to perform in a competition and we went everywhere in Atlanta after that. We went to the Hard Rock Cafe* and even got to listen to the Atlanta Symphony. It was like a two-and-a-half-hour performance, but they were unbelievable! It was great!

The next day we attended the actual competition and were ranked as being superior, which is the best ranking of course. And after that we went to Six Flags, the amusement park, for about nine hours and rode just about every ride there.

And then the next day we went to the Georgia Aquarium and got to see all sorts of sea life that was really cool from all over the world. And after that we went to the World of Coca-Cola* and got to taste sodas* from every continent. It was very neat.*

Following that day we got back on the bus and rode five hours all the way home watching Jack Black movies.

Who is Jack Black?

Oh, he's a real goofy* actor. The bus ride was kind of long because of Atlanta's traffic, so it felt good to be back in my little old hometown.

What instrument do you play?

Well, my main instrument is the piano, but I also play the bass guitar and the upright bass, which is what I play in the school orchestra.

What do you do on an ordinary day?

On an ordinary school day, I try to wake up at 6:00 every morning and get some extra piano practice before going to what we call zero period* at school. Most students start at first period, but zero period is like an extra class you can take before that. I take jazz ensemble. I get home after school at around 4:30, and then I do homework, eat dinner, practice instruments, or maybe go to church for a music rehearsal, and I usually try to go to bed by 11:00.

Is there anything you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Um. Let's see. I'd probably like to give the advice to make sure to cherish* your youthful years. I do.

A Few Words

Hard Rock Cafe: This company has restaurants in many big cities in many countries. They are popular with young people.

World of Coca-Cola: Coca-Cola began in Atlanta. The World of Coca-Cola is a museum about Coca-Cola.

Soda: In different parts of the U.S., these beverages are called soda, pop, soda pop, or soft drinks.

Neat: A slang word that means very good, enjoyable.

Goofy: This is an informal word. It means silly or funny.

Zero period: The hours in U.S. schools are usually called periods. The first hour of school is first period, the second hour of school is second period, and so forth. Some schools have a zero period for students who want to come to school very early and do extra work.

Cherish: If you cherish something, you love it and want to take good care of it.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you do on an ordinary school day? What do you usually do on a day when there is no school?
2. What kind of movies or television shows do you like to watch? What kind do you not like? Why? Do you have a favorite actor? Who is it? Why is this person your favorite?



Sol, 17

When I met Sol, I didn't realize that English is not her first language. She has learned English very well.

What have you been doing this week?

Well, this week I've been focusing on trying to get my extracurriculars* started, because the year has just started, and I'm trying to study and getting my grades up this year.

What kind of extracurricular activities do you do?

Oh, I've been doing speech and debate, and Battle of the Books, and soon Science Olympiad is going to get started and I'm going to be doing that. And in addition after school I also have a Jewish youth program that I do, and I help with the kids in Sunday school* at Temple. I'm basically like a teacher's assistant.

And what is Battle of the Books?

Battle of the Books is a school club that is focused on a competition with a list of books that we get every year, and we compete on our knowledge of the books.

What kind of books?

Well, this year there are fifteen on the list, and I just started reading *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath. And the list is mostly fiction but there is some nonfiction in there.

And what is the Science Olympiad?

Science Olympiad is a school club that is also geared to* preparing towards a competition, but it's for a state science competition where we compete in partners on different science events.

What do you hope to do after high school?

After high school I really hope to get a degree in chemistry because that's what I'm really passionate about,* and then probably go to medical school to focus on people and the brain, which I'm also really interested in, and I want to be a neurologist.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Uh, I don't know. I'm kind of a new English speaker. I've been here for six years so it's kind of surreal* to talk to kids who are also learning English.

What is your first language?

My first language is Hebrew. I'm from Israel.

How did you end up here?

Well, my dad got a transfer from work, and we all thought it would be a really good experience, and I have loved it so far and so has my whole family.

So, is there anything you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Well, first of all, "Hi." And I guess a really good piece of advice is really go after what you love and work towards doing what you are passionate about.

A Few Words

Extracurriculars: This is a short way of saying "extracurricular activities." The regular subjects at school are the curriculum. Extra activities outside of the regular class times are called extracurricular activities.

Sunday school: Religious education classes on Sundays are often called Sunday school.

Geared to: "Geared to doing something" means "organized for this purpose."

Passionate about: If you are passionate about something, you think it is very important and feel excited about learning and working in this area.

Surreal: Very strange or like something that could never really happen.

Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of extracurricular activities do you participate in? Do any of the activities that Sol participates in seem interesting to you? What kind of extracurricular activities do you wish your school could start?
2. Are you passionate about any subject? What is it? Do you know students who are passionate about things that do not seem interesting to you? What are those things?



Michael, 12

What have you been doing this week?

I've been going to school and playing outside with friends, mostly.

What are you doing in school?

We just finished our end-of-grade tests. School ends in two weeks.

What do you play when you play with friends?

I play football, soccer, basketball with the guys in the neighborhood. We play at Evan's house. He has a basketball hoop in his yard.

And I see a fishing pole in your hands.

Yeah, I like to go to the pond and fish. I normally go about once a week. I usually catch a few. Today I hooked five, but they all got off. But I did catch two. It really keeps you going.* It makes you think, "I really want to catch that fish." My dad loves to fish, so he taught me.

I don't think you've always lived in this neighborhood. Is that right?

Yeah. We lived in Switzerland for two years. I liked it, but I like it here more. There's more stuff* to do here, more entertainment. But it was fun in Switzerland.

Did you learn a new language in Switzerland?

I already knew Swiss German because my mom was from Switzerland. I learned it when I was three or four.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Um. Hello from America!

A Few Words

Keeps you going: This phrase has more than one meaning. *Keep* often means “continue.” Here, Michael means that when the fish get off the hook before he can get them out of the water, he wants to come back and try again.

Stuff: This word is very informal. *Stuff to do* is an informal way to say “things to do.” (Notice that *stuff* takes a singular verb.)

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a hobby or special interest that you learned from one of your parents? What is it? What is your favorite way to spend time with your parents?
2. Michael doesn't like to fail when he tries to catch a fish. He continues trying. What new skill are you developing that requires you to continue trying even though you often fail?



Trevor, 13

I met Trevor while my husband and I were visiting the place where the first airplane flew.

What have you been doing this week?

We're on a school field trip.* It's a four-day trip across our state and back.

Where have you gone?

We went to UNC* and learned about the basketball history and their star basketball players. Then we went to Somerset Plantation* and we learned about how they treated the slaves and how they made candles and wrote, and we learned about the owners too.

Then we went to the Blackbeard* museum, and we learned about Blackbeard, how he became a pirate and how he died and what his battle style was.

Then we learned about the Wright brothers'* history. That's today. Before we came onto the trip, we built replicas of their gliders at school. We researched what they flew and how they flew and what inspired them.

Are you doing anything just for fun, or are all your activities educational?

Um, tonight we'll have a dance and last night we went bowling.

Do you have any special interests?

I like sports. I like basketball, and I'm on the school baseball team.

What are your plans for the future, after you finish school?

Um, I want to be a zoologist. I want to study animals. And I might be like my older sister and be a photographer and take pictures of animals too.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

You guys are going to get there.* Just keep working hard.

A Few Words

Field trip: When teachers take students to someplace away from their school to learn things, it is called a field trip.

UNC: University of North Carolina. This university has many strong education programs and one of the best basketball teams in the U.S.

Plantation: About 150 years ago, there were very large farms in the southern U.S. which were called plantations. The owners were very wealthy families who came from Europe, and the workers were slaves who came from Africa. Slaves had no freedom and no rights.

Blackbeard: He was a famous pirate of the 1700s.

Wright brothers: Two brothers, Orville and Wilbur Wright, were the first people to build and fly a real airplane with an engine. They flew at a place called Kitty Hawk in North Carolina.

Going to get there: When Trevor says, "You guys are going to get there," he means that you will achieve your goals.

Discussion Questions

1. If you could come to the U.S., which of the places that Trevor talks about would you like to visit? What other parts of the United States would you like to visit?
2. Trevor believes that you and your country will have a good future. Do you agree?



Alex, 14

Thanksgiving is an American holiday on the fourth Thursday of November. I met Alex at a coffee shop. She and her father had been running together.

What have you been doing this week?

Well, this week my cousins came down from New York* and we celebrated Thanksgiving* at my house with the other side of the family that is in Charlotte.* We had a turkey,* and everybody brought something, like a dessert, and we all just sat at the table and had fun. And afterward we played games.

Are there any other foods that are Thanksgiving traditions for your family besides the turkey?

We always have my grandmother's broccoli and cheese casserole, which sounds gross* but it's really delicious. We had mashed potatoes and sweet potatoes.* My mom made her amazing orange-cranberry* relish, and this year we also had ham, which was different. We also had pecan pie and pumpkin cheesecake.*

What kind of games did you play?

Well, this year we played Wii* basketball and tennis.

Did you go shopping on Friday?

We went to Charlotte because it was my aunt's birthday, so we hung out with them for a while and watched the football game between Auburn and Alabama. My mom went to a bookstore for a while, but we didn't do any other shopping.

What have you been doing today?

Well, my dad and I went for a run together, and then we decided to stop and take a break here to get something to drink. It's a little cold outside.

How far do you run?

Well, it'll be five miles* after we run back home from here.

Did you do anything else this week?

Well, I saw the new Harry Potter movie, which is very good, with a lot of my friends. Tonight I'll babysit my little brother and my sister so my parents can go see the Harry Potter movie together.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Well, I don't know if we're that different* or not, but it doesn't seem like we are. I would like to say, well, good luck and have a good time with your life.

A Few Words

Thanksgiving: This is an important holiday in the U.S. on the fourth Thursday in November. Families usually get together, eat a big dinner, and talk about all the things that they are thankful for. People travel long distances to be with their relatives. There are many football games on television. On Friday, many people like to go shopping, and stores have special low prices to encourage people to come to the stores.

New York, Charlotte: It takes about ten hours to drive from New York to Alex's home in Greensboro, North Carolina. It takes about two hours to drive to Greensboro from Charlotte.

Turkey: This is a large bird that is native to North America.

Gross: This is an informal word that young people use to say that something is unpleasant or disgusting.

Sweet potatoes: These are a yellow root vegetable originally from Central America.

Cranberry: This is a red berry that grows in North America.

Pecan, pumpkin: Pecan is a kind of nut, and pumpkin is a kind of squash. They come from North America.

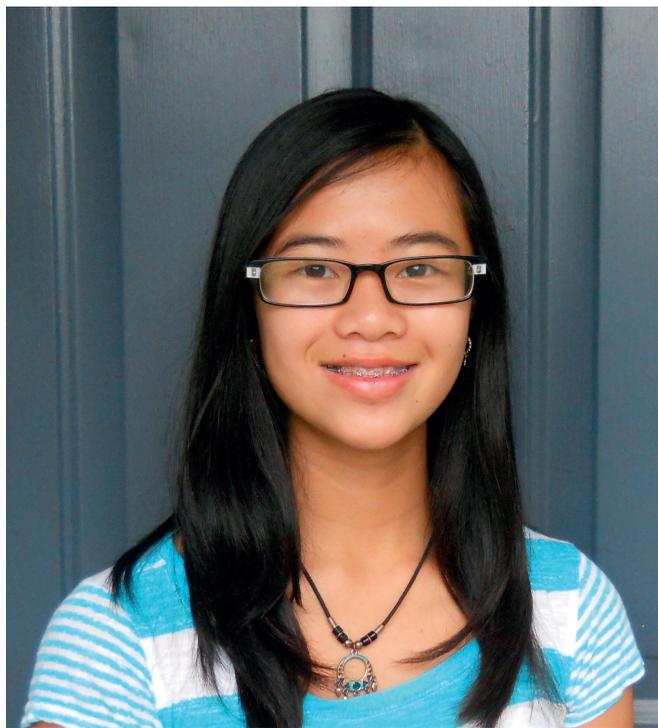
Wii: A video game system.

Five miles: About eight kilometers.

That different: Some people say "that different" as a way of saying "very different."

Discussion Questions

1. Alex mentioned several kinds of food (turkey, cranberries, pecans, pumpkins) that are native to North America. Have you seen or eaten any of them? Do you like to try new foods? What are the special foods at your family's celebrations?
2. Alex and her father run long distances together as a sport. In the U.S., it is not surprising to see a father and daughter running together. Would it be surprising in your country? What kinds of things do fathers and daughters usually do together in your country?



Bella, 13

What have you been doing this week?

Well, I've been going to glee practice to perform for a winter concert. I've been doing a lot of homework, and I'm going to piano practice later today.

Tell me about glee.

It's this group of people who sing and dance the songs for the season, or whatever we like, songs from the 50s, back in the past, or modern music. We have a teacher who leads us. It's an after-school activity. The regular class in school is chorus.* Glee is an additional activity.

What classes are you taking?

Um, well, I take Algebra 1, and advanced language arts, and science, and social studies, chorus, technology, and PE.*

What are you doing in your piano lessons?

Well, right now, I'm just a beginner so I'm studying how to play.

Why did you decide to study piano?

I see how amazing the pianists are and how they're really good at playing these amazing pieces,* so I decided to learn how to do that.

Did you celebrate Thanksgiving this past week?

My sister and I celebrated Thanksgiving with our family that came around the state. Some of our cousins are in college, and they came. We ate turkey, of course, and corn, mashed potatoes, gravy, and

these special Vietnamese chips. They're hard to describe though.

What are you going to do this weekend?

I'm going to my temple and practice dancing for Vietnamese New Year. It's in February. I go to, like,* a Buddhist temple. We have lots of different celebrations.

How many people in your family can speak Vietnamese?

Basically all* of us. The kids are kind of* losing the Vietnamese culture, so we're trying to keep it up and keep up with our Vietnamese.

Do you know what you want to do when you are an adult?

I don't really know. I'm still trying to decide, but I want to do something that helps other people. Maybe a nurse, but I'm not sure.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Um, well, keep learning and have a good education so you can have a good future in life.

A Few Words

Chorus: A group of people who sing together.

PE: Physical education, a sports and exercise class.

Pieces: Anything that people sing or play on a musical instrument is called a "piece of music."

Like: Young people often use the word *like* in the middle of their sentences. Their teachers say it is not a good habit, but most young people use *like*.

Basically all: This is an informal way to say "almost all."

Kind of: This is an informal way to say "in a little way."

Discussion Questions

1. One of Bella's teachers gives extra time after school to help students learn music. Who is one of your special teachers? What does this teacher do to help students?
2. Bella thinks that people who can play the piano very well are amazing. Who do you think is amazing? Why?



Blake, 15

What have you been doing this week?

Well, exam time is coming up and I've been trying to study hard for them, taking notes and all. It's a very stressful time for me.

How do you prepare for the exams?

Well, the teachers give us notes, and we write them down and study 'em and then take the exams, but most of us barely have any time to study, especially the basketball team. They have a lot of games next week. I'm actually in the church choir. I have to do all my exam work and practice for the choir,* and we have all this stuff coming up for Christmas.*

Tell me about singing in the choir.

We usually have practice once or twice a week. We sing, we get to meet each other, and we all have fun together, and we all sing together at church. The choir sings every Sunday. My dad sings every Sunday and I do too. But we have extra practices for Christmas music. On an ordinary Sunday we do one to three songs, and Christmas we do, I don't know, like ten songs, and that's why we have extra practices for Christmas music.

Tell me what you did this weekend.

This weekend I got to go to my grandmother's house, which was a very big treat for me. I love to help her out,* and I did work in her yard. I got paid for it, but I'd work without pay anytime she wants me to because I really love her.

Tell me about her.

My grandmother is very sweet. She helps a lot of people. She's a Methodist,* so she goes to a Methodist church every Sunday. She helps anyone who is in need. She has two sweet dogs, Bell and Ella. One is a golden lab and the other is a mixture. She has the best cooking ever. Her cake is wonderful. Her pies are FANTASTIC! If the only thing I ever had to eat for the rest of my life was her cooking, I would be happy. She makes the best grilled cheese* ever!

How is your family?

My family's been OK. I mean, a little argument here and there, but that's OK. It's a very happy time we have. We're kind of last-minute people. So we set up everything at the last minute and then get ready for Christmas.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Happy Holidays!

A Few Words

Choir: A group of people who sing together, usually in a school or church.

Christmas: The major winter holiday in the United States. Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus, and everyone celebrates—family, friends, and community.

Help out: This means the same as *help* but people often use *help out* when they talk about helping someone who has problems or someone who has too much work to do.

Methodist: Christian churches are divided into groups that are a little bit different in organization and style of worship. Blake goes to a Presbyterian church and his grandmother goes to a Methodist church, but this never causes problems for the family.

Grilled cheese: This is a hot cheese sandwich.

Discussion Questions

1. Is music an important part of your culture? What kind of music do you enjoy listening to or performing?
2. Blake says that his family sometimes argues a little bit, but they are a very happy family anyway. Do you agree that small disagreements are a normal part of family life? How do you take care of disagreements in your family or among your friends?



Amy, almost 13

What have you been doing this week?

We haven't been doing a lot at school because it is right before the break,* so we don't do a lot. They try to squish* in a lot of tests during the week before we get out so we can start a new unit* after the break. So I had a math test and a science test. In orchestra we've been learning new notes,* how to read them and how to do them on the instrument.

What instrument do you play?

I play the viola.*

Is there anything else happening?

I have a guitar lesson this afternoon. And Christmas is coming very soon. On Christmas most of my friends wake up in the morning and open presents, but my family doesn't traditionally celebrate Christmas. We don't have any Vietnamese holidays in this part of the year so we just celebrate Christmas for the fun of it. We don't open presents in the morning. We prepare food all day and then my family and friends come over, and we open presents at night and eat. We usually make Vietnamese food, and sometimes chicken wings* too.

Have you been buying and making presents?

I usually make cards or homemade gifts, but this year I haven't had time. I had this test in language arts a couple weeks ago and I failed* it. I got really upset, and I asked the teacher if I could have a re-take.* At first she said no, and I started

crying because I knew my mom would get really upset, so the teacher let me take a re-take, so I have been studying. I got 100* on my re-take.

What do you study in language arts?

We learn parts of speech, grammar, and do presentations in class. Recently we made a parody* of *The Night Before Christmas** and we presented it today.

Anything else?

My birthday is tomorrow, so I'm having friends over. We're going to have a sleepover.* We'll go ice skating and then we'll go rent movies and we'll go back home and watch them.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Umm, let me think. You should work hard for your future because it will pay off.

A Few Words

Break: A vacation is sometimes called a break.

Squish: This is an informal word for putting something big in a small space.

Unit: A section of schoolwork on one topic. Each unit usually ends with a test.

Note: Each sound in music is a note. Musicians must learn to read a special way of writing notes on paper.

Viola: A musical instrument like a large violin.

Chicken wings: Fried chicken wings, usually with a spicy sauce. This is a very popular snack in the U.S.

Fail: If you fail a test, you get a really low mark on it.

Re-take: If you re-do something, you do it a second time. If you take a test a second time, it is a re-take. Amy asked if she could study more and take the test a second time.

100: A perfect mark on a test.

Parody: If you copy a famous piece of writing in a funny way, so that people laugh, it is called a parody.

The Night Before Christmas: A famous poem for children.

Sleepover: A party for young children or young teens. Some girls will stay all night at Amy's house, and her mother will make sure that they behave well and are safe.

Discussion Questions

1. Amy will celebrate her birthday with friends, and her family will celebrate Christmas, even though it is not a special holiday for them. When does your family have special celebrations? Are your celebrations a little different from the celebrations of your neighbors?
2. Amy was very upset when she did poorly on a test. What kinds of things upset you? How do you become calm again?



Gordon, 15

What have you been doing this week?

Let me think. I go to school. I had soccer practice only once a week 'cause it's winter. I went to see the Trans-Siberian Orchestra. They come to town every year. They're really good.

What kind of music do they do?

It's like rock, but it's like Christmas too sort of.* It's a really good show. They've got lasers and pyrotechnics. I also went to church and choir practice. I do the sound board* most of the time.

What are you studying in school?

I'm taking pre-calculus, AP European history,* band, English, French, chemistry, and environmental science.

What instrument do you play in band?

I play the bassoon for concert band. For marching band I play the tuba. They're completely different instruments. You can't march with a bassoon.

What do you study in environmental science?

So far we've studied a lot about weather and weather patterns. We also learn about earthquakes and tornados and that sort of stuff.

What will you do after high school?

I plan to go to college. I'm not sure what I'll go for yet. Probably something in science because I enjoy science.

Is there anything that you'd like to say to kids in other countries?

Um. I think that a lot of the things that the rest of the world thinks about America, that they get in movies or on TV—from reality TV shows and things like that—don't really portray American life. We're probably not that different from you.

A Few Words

Sort of: This is an informal phrase and means that something is similar but not exactly the same.

Sound board: This is the set of controls for microphones and speakers in a sound system.

AP European history: AP stands for Advanced Placement. AP courses are difficult courses. A very good high school student can take an AP course and then a test. If the student does well on the test, he or she gets university credit for the subject.

Discussion Questions

1. Gordon thinks that many television programs give an inaccurate picture of American life. What kind of programs do you see about American life? Do you think that they show American life accurately? Do newspapers and television shows sometimes give the world an inaccurate picture of life in your country?
2. What do you think are the similarities and differences between American teens and teens in your country?



Jacob, 17

What have you been doing this week?

I've been, sort of, preparing for finals,* finishing up work, trying to balance the things I need to do with the things I should do. I need to do things like studying for a test now or getting in assignments that are past due, and I should do things like exercising or catching up on things that will help me up ahead, on tests in the future. I've been trying to work on a big English assignment and prepare for finals. I stayed up all night trying to finish, as well as preparing for a performance on the clarinet.

Have you been doing anything else?

I've been trying to get a basic draft of a book I want to write. I feel like the essays you write at school are constricting. This is writing I enjoy doing. It helps me relax and wind down.

What do you want to do after high school?

After high school I want to go to a university and get a doctorate in some kind of science. Right now I'm aiming for entomology, the study of insects, especially ants. That's my passion. I'm really interested in the complex societies they form and how they work together. If you want to get me talking, ask me about ants. They have really complex and diverse societies. They are the most complex of all animal societies. It's ants, not elephants or primates or monkeys, that are the closest to human societies.

I know that when you were small, you had serious health problems. Your parents had to take you to the hospital really fast many times. Is that still true?

I still have health issues. I have allergy-induced asthma. That means I have allergies that sometimes make it very difficult to breathe. It limits me from doing activities or going places sometimes. It's just a part of my life. I live with it.*

Are you doing anything for Martin Luther King Day?*

I'm probably going to study with a friend because I have finals right away. We had a powerful assembly program at school. The African-American student community group gave a serious eye-opener* on how bad it was at that time period. A lot of people were disturbed by it.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Hmm. In the end,* we're all human. It's good to have an identity and celebrate your history, but in the end, we're all human.

A Few Words

Finals: The exams at the end of a school term are called finals.

Live with it: If you can't remove a problem from your life, you "live with it."

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: This is a holiday in January in honor of a man who helped lead the struggle for equal rights for all citizens of the U.S., no matter what the color of their skin is or what their family background is.

Eye-opener: An event that helps you see or understand a problem that you didn't notice before is an eye-opener.

In the end: This means "after we have thought about everything."

Discussion Questions

1. Jacob thinks ants are very, very interesting. What animal do you think is interesting? Why?
2. Jacob has a serious health problem that doctors can't cure. He "lives with it." What is a problem that you or one of your friends lives with? What do you do to help you live with the problem? This could be any kind of problem, for example, an economic problem, a medical problem, a family problem, a community problem.



Jasmine, 15

What have you been doing this week?

Basically, I go to school. After I go to school, I might hang out,* socialize* with my friends at Burger King or McDonald's.* First I study and then I hang with my friends and socialize. On weekends I might go to the movies, go to a party, get my hair did,* or go to the nail shop.*

What did you do last weekend?

I went to a party, and I watched movies on TV every day.

What are you doing in school this week?

I'm studying biology. We're studying the ecosystem. I don't like biology too much. Actually, I hate it. It's my least favorite class.

What classes do you like?

I like dance—that's my favorite subject—and math. I have to do a lot of research in dance.

Dance sounds unusual. Is it a regular subject?

Dance is like any other subject. It's like physical education. We study all kinds of dance: ballet, modern, jazz, hip-hop. We do it, and we study about it. I have to do my research on it every day. My teacher gives us a famous dancer like Alvin Ailey. He's dead now, but he founded a famous dance company. I get on the computer and do research on him and his dance company. We have questions like, "What kind of positioning do they use?"; "What kind of energy do they use?"

Do you like living in San Francisco?

Actually, I used to* live in San Francisco, but I moved to Oakland a year ago. San Francisco is a great city, but it's very large. You have to know your way. In Oakland, well you have to avoid some parts of Oakland, but there is less drama* in Oakland. You feel free in Oakland.

Is there anything you want to say to kids in other countries?

Do you want to visit San Francisco? You should think about it, because it's a good city.

A Few Words

Hang, hang with, hang out with: Very informal words that mean "talk to and enjoy being with friends without doing anything special or exciting."

Socialize: An informal way of saying "have fun with other people."

Burger King and McDonald's: Popular hamburger restaurants where food is fast and inexpensive.

Get my hair did: There are different ways of speaking English in the U.S. When a woman goes to a shop to get her hair cut or curled, she usually says, "I'll get my hair done." Young black women like Jasmine, however, often say "get my hair did." It's not a mistake. It's just another way of using English.

Nail shop: A small shop where women can get a manicure or have their fingernails painted.

Used to: If you "used to do" something, it means you did it in the past but don't do it now.

Drama: In this sentence, *drama* means excitement, especially negative excitement.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your favorite class at school, and what is your least favorite class? Why? Are your interests similar to Jasmine's or very different from hers?
2. Do you have a lot of time to hang out with your friends? Where do you go to hang out? Why is that a good place to go?



Kyle, almost 14

What have you been doing this week?

Well, in school we're having a lot of new math and stuff,* and we took a couple of tests this week also.

What's happening outside of school?

Baseball is about to start and I'm really ready for that. I'm in a PONY League* and it's recreational. It's not a very big league. What you do is your parents sign you up and pay a little money for you to play, and it doesn't cost very much. Basketball season just ended, and I was playing that. There are a lot of other teams in that league. And my birthday is in four days and I'll be fourteen.

How will you celebrate?

Oh I don't know. I'll probably go play laser tag* or something.

I think your parents are divorced. Is that right?

Yeah. I live with my mom normally, and every Thursday I go to my dad's for the evening, from 6:00 to 9:00. Every other weekend I go to my dad's house and stay from Friday to Sunday, and then I go back to my mom's.

What are you looking forward to?

Baseball. And I'm kind of excited to go into high school this fall. I'm probably going to take a class called Scientific Visualization and Graphics. It's really cool. You can learn how to make video games and stuff.

Will you do anything special this summer?

Probably go on a couple of camping* trips with my family, my mom's family most of the time. We like camping a lot. At the end of the school year we have a camping trip where there is a thirteen-mile* trail down the mountain. We camp for like* three days and then go hike down the trail. It's pretty cool.

Do you know what you'd like to do after high school?

Not really. I have a faint idea.* I'd like to go into science or engineering. We did a career finder thing on the computer at school, and it suggested science or engineering for me. The first four careers were all kinds of engineering. The fourth was nuclear engineering. Right. As if* I'm going to handle nuclear bombs or something.

Is there anything you'd like to say to kids in other countries?

Just "Hi," I guess.

A Few Words

Stuff: An informal word for "things." Young people often use *stuff* when they aren't sure of the best way to explain something.

PONY League: An organization which began in the U.S. and is now in 21 countries. It organizes baseball programs to help young people "grow into healthier and happier adults."

Laser tag: A game where friends chase and shoot each other with light-beam guns. No one gets hurt.

Go camping: When people go camping, they live outdoors for a few days, usually in a forest or near a lake. They sleep, cook, and eat outdoors.

Thirteen miles: About 21 kilometers.

Like: Many young people use the word *like* when they mean "approximately" or when they are trying to think of the next word to say. Their parents and teachers tell them that this is a bad habit.

Faint idea: This means "my idea is not clear or strong and I'm not sure about it."

Right. As if...: This is informal English and it really means "No!" Kyle means, "No, I don't want to study nuclear engineering because I don't want to learn how to make bombs." Here's another example:

First person: You could buy a car.

Second person: Right. As if I had enough money.

In this example, the second person means, "No, I couldn't. I don't have enough money."

Discussion Questions

1. Do families (or other groups of people) in your country go camping for fun? Does camping seem interesting or unpleasant to you? What kinds of outdoor activities do you like? Why?
2. Because his parents are divorced, Kyle must move frequently from his mom's house to his dad's house and then back again to his mom's house. What do you think about this way of living?



Sue, 17

What have you been doing this week?

I've gone to school every day this week, and we have exams next week, so we have been studying a lot. I play two sports and I've gone to basketball practice and volleyball practice. And we had a basketball game that we just won.

Did you have to travel to get to the game?

We traveled about thirty minutes to play the other team.

Does playing two sports take time?

A lot. I usually have two hours of basketball practice every day and two and a half hours of volleyball practice twice a week.

What are you studying?

I'm in pre-calculus,* and I take Spanish 3* and physics. I also take humanities, which is like history and English combined.

Is that all of your classes?

Yes Ma'am.*

What will you do this weekend?

Study for my exams! That's about all I have time to do.

How is your family?

Well, my brother is sick. He has a cough and can't sleep well, but we're really OK.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

I hope you have a great year, do well, and study hard.

A Few Words

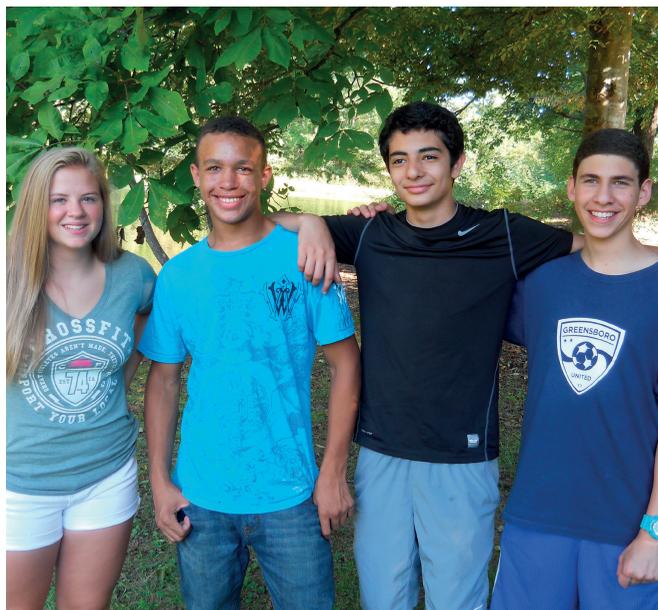
Pre-calculus: This course is sometimes called Algebra 3. It includes algebra and trigonometry and prepares students for calculus classes.

Spanish 3: This is the third year of Spanish classes.

Ma'am: Sue is from the southern part of the U.S. In this part of the country, polite young people always say "Yes Ma'am" not just "yes" when they speak to adult women. They say "Yes Sir" when they speak to adult men.

Discussion Questions

1. What exams are you taking at school this month? Are they difficult for you? How are you preparing for them?
2. Sue spends fifteen or twenty hours each week practicing and playing sports. What sports do you like to play? How do you get exercise and stay healthy?



Four Friends, ages 13 and 14

What have you been doing this week?

Asim: After school today, we came to the park. Two of us were playing baseball, and two of us walked around making videos.

Why are you making videos?

Alex: Because it's fun, something to kill time.* We put them on YouTube.

What are you doing in school this week?

Mahmoud: CST preparation. That's California Standardized Testing. Everyone in second through eleventh grade takes the test. It helps decide what classes you get to take next year. The preparation helps us get ready for the test.

What do you do on weekends?

Des: Go to the mall.*

Alex: Buy clothes.

Asim: I play video games. I go on the computer a little. Sometimes I hang with* my brother, or I hang out with my friends.

How do you get money to buy clothes?

Des: From Mom.

Asim: I have a job painting. I paint houses on weekends with my uncles, and when I get money, I use it to buy clothes.

Alex: I work at East Oakland Regional Park. We go and paint benches, pull up weeds, make the park cleaner. I get money, and then I buy clothes, or food (I'm a junk food* junkie*), or I might take these friends to the movies.

Is there anything you want to say to kids in other countries?

Des: Stay safe.

Alex: Have as much fun as possible. Learn to turf. (It's a kind of dance.)

Asim: Hmm. Don't go to the bad stuff, like drugs or alcohol—or war.

Mahmoud: Admire the little things.

A Few Words

Kill time: If you kill time, you do things that aren't really boring but aren't really useful either.

Mall: A large shopping area with many shops.

Hang, hang with, hang out with: These are very informal words. They mean "talk to and enjoy being with friends without doing anything special or exciting."

Junk food: This is food (often for snacks) that tastes good but isn't very nutritious.

Junkie: A slang word for a person who is addicted to something or who can't stop using something.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you enjoy junk food? What do you do to stay healthy? Do you have any habits that you think aren't really healthy?
2. Mahmoud says, "Admire the little things." What are some of the little things in life that make you happy? Why are they special to you?



Gabriela, 19

What have you been doing this week?

Well, I go to San Jose State.* Mondays and Wednesdays I get up and work out, and I start my classes. In between classes I have an hour-and-a-half break, so I usually go to the library and read, browse* the internet, do homework, write essays, anything I have to do. Tuesdays and Thursdays I usually get up and go to school for an 8:30 class, and then since the class is anatomy, I go to the library and study, study, study. Then I have a lecture. Then I go to lunch, something fast because I have another class afterwards.

Today is Friday. What are you doing?

Fridays I have off, so I'm out here enjoying the weather. It's a day to do other things than reading and homework. I'm here with my mom and my two little nieces and my little cousin. We took them to story time at the library* and then we came here.

How old are they?

They're four, two, and nine months.

What do you do on the weekends?

Saturday morning I go out for a run, see friends, or go to a family get-together.* Sunday I study.

What are you studying?

Nursing.

Why did you decide to become a nurse?

When I was fifteen, an aunt of mine had quadruplets,* and seeing her through the pregnancy and going to the hospital when she was there and helping her with four kids, I decided I wanted to become a nurse. Before that I wanted to be a teacher. It changed my perspective.

How many people are in your family?

My mother's family had eight sisters and two brothers, but I'm her only child. There are a lot of cousins and a whole lot of little girls. We usually try to spend time together and do a lot of things together—family bonding time,* you could say. When I'm a nurse, I want to specialize with kids.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Well, make sure to read and get involved in things, so you can pursue a career in something that you are really going to like.

A Few Words

San Jose State: In the United States, each state government runs universities. A state university in the city of San Jose is called San Jose State University.

Browse: When animals (like goats) eat a little bit of grass here and a little bit there, they browse. The word *browse* is now used for people looking for information on the internet.

Story time at the library: Most American towns have a public library that is not part of a school. The librarians there often have an hour when they read stories aloud to small children.

Get-together: This is an informal word for any time people spend time together.

Quadruplets: Four babies born at the same time. Three babies are triplets. Two babies are twins.

Family bonding time: *Bond* means “stick together” or “glue together.” When people spend time together so that they will feel very close to each other emotionally, some people call it bonding time.

Discussion Questions

1. Gabriela changed her mind about something important in her life (becoming a nurse instead of a teacher). When have you changed your mind about something? Does it seem like a good decision now?
2. Gabriela has no brothers or sisters, so she is an “only child.” Her grandmother had ten children (eight girls and two boys). What do you think is the best size for a family? How many sons and how many daughters would you like to have? Why do you think this is a good size for a family?



Andrew, 14

I was walking in a park near my home when I met Andrew and his parents. The park marks the place where the last major battle of the American Revolution happened. Andrew and his parents are part of a group of people who come to the park to teach about American history. They wear historical clothes and live the way people did many years ago. It is called reenactment. Everything they do is like things were 200 years ago.

What have you been doing this week?

I came here to the park yesterday afternoon, and we slept here last night in that tent. It's like the kind they used in the Revolutionary War, but a little bit bigger because people then were shorter than they are now.

What do you do while you're here?

We pretty much* cook over the fire. I've been playing the drums, hauling wood, and throwing a tomahawk.

What's a tomahawk?

It's kinda* like an ax. It's got only one sharp edge. You try to get it to hit a target.

Are you good at that?

Ohhh yeah.

What kind of a shirt are you wearing?

Uh, it's a shirt they would have worn in the 18th century.

How about your shoes? Your socks?

Yeah. Everything I'm wearing is like clothes they wore in the 1700s.

How long have you been doing reenactments?

Pretty much since I was born because my parents are reenactors. We go at least once a month, pretty much all over the state of North Carolina.

What did you do the rest of the week?

School. Monday we had marching band* practice. I play percussion—the tenor drum.

Tell us about marching band.

There are ninety-one of us in the band. While we march, we play music and do different formations and stuff. We have formations like boxes and figure eights. We play in competitions and at football games. We've won forty-one trophies in competitions.

Tell me about your dog over there.

Oh, he's a German Shepherd. He's two or three years old. We found him while we were at a reenactment. He was hungry and didn't have a home, so we took him home with us. When we got him, he weighed sixty pounds* and now he weighs 125 pounds, so he was pretty hungry and thin when we found him.

When I wait for the school bus,* he goes to the end of the road and waits with me until I actually get on the bus before he goes back to the house. He comes out to the end of the road right about the time school gets out and waits for me to get off the bus. Then he walks home with me.

Is there anything you'd like to say to kids in other countries?

Hmm. I guess, "Hi!"

A Few Words

Pretty much: An informal expression that means "almost completely" or "almost all of the time." Andrew uses this expression often.

Kinda: This is a casual way to say "kind of," an informal expression which means "a little."

Marching band: It is a tradition at American football games for a student music band to play during a break in the middle of the game.

Sixty pounds: A little bit more than 27 kilograms. One hundred twenty-five pounds is almost 57 kilograms.

School bus: In the U.S., there are special buses that are used only for taking students to and from school. They are always yellow with black markings.

Discussion Questions

1. Andrew and his family spend a lot of time studying history and learning about life in the 1700s. Do you enjoy studying history? Do you think you would enjoy living outside sometimes as a reenactor? Why or why not?
2. Andrew has a dog as a pet. Do you have any pet animals? What makes them special? What kind of animals would you like to see someday (in a zoo or in their natural habitat)?



Nichole, 17

I met Nichole while she was helping at a work day at a farm where people with special needs can live. The work day happens each year to honor the memory of a special man in her town who died in a car accident.

What have you been doing this week?

This has been a busy week. I have lots to tell. Monday I went to school and then I went to work Monday night. And Tuesday I went to school but only for half a day because I went on a field trip* with my photography class to a local college to take pictures. And then on Wednesday I went to a baseball game for the whole class day because all of the students who made honor roll* got to go on a baseball trip. And then Thursday I went to school and I went to work Thursday night. And then on Friday I went to school, and then Friday night I went to the big birthday dinner of one of my really close friends. And today I'm here at this service project.

What do you do when you go to work?

I'm the front desk secretary at a counseling center.

Are you graduating from high school?

I'm going to graduate this year.

What will you do after that?

I'm planning on going to Appalachian State.* I'm going to be a double major* in photography and Spanish with a minor* in social work.

Why do you want to study these subjects?

Well, I guess these are the things I'm extremely fond of. I love photography, and helping the Hispanic community* is what I'm really passionate about.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Whoa, I don't know. I guess, always think the best of people. People are trying to be the best they can be. There is hate in the world, but there is also a lot of love.

A Few Words

Field trip: When teachers take students to someplace away from their school to learn things, it is called a field trip.

Honor roll: The names of all the students who get good grades in all of their classes are written on a special list called the honor roll.

Appalachian State: In the U.S., there are universities that are run by the governments of each of the fifty states as well as universities that are run privately. Appalachian State is run by the state of North Carolina.

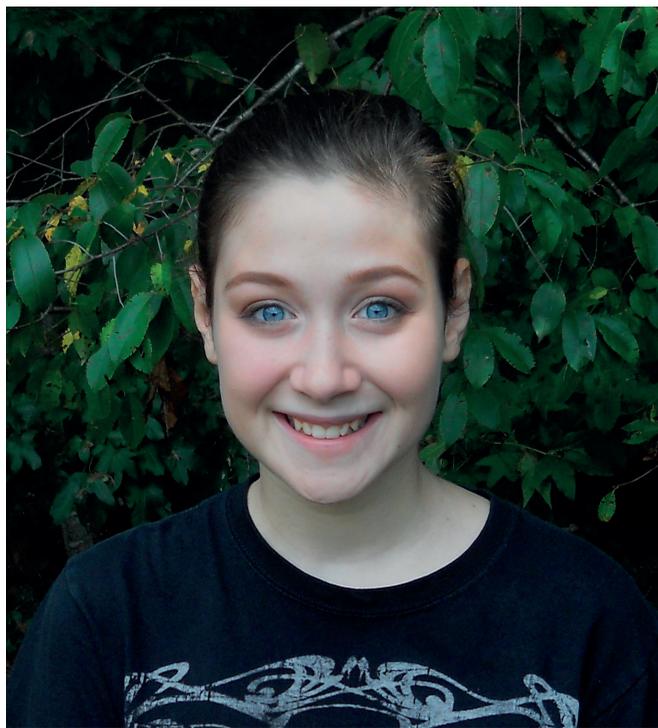
Double major: The main subject that a student chooses is called a major (perhaps mathematics or engineering or economics). If a student studies two main subjects, it is called a double major, and the student takes extra classes.

Minor: Students usually have a second specialty, which is called a minor. For example, an economics student might take a minor in mathematics.

Hispanic community: In the U.S., there are many people who come from Mexico or South America and speak Spanish. Because many of them are new immigrants, they often have special needs.

Discussion Questions

1. Has someone special in your life died? How do you remember or honor this person?
2. Nichole says that we should think positive things about other people in the world. Do you agree? Why or why not?



Casey, 16

What have you been doing this week?

Well, this week I've been working on schoolwork and going to a swim class to get ready for a swimming meet.

What are you doing in school?

Oh, a lot of stuff. Math and biology and history, and I've been learning Italian.

You're home schooled,* aren't you? Tell me about it.

I guess it's like going to public school, but the school is only a few feet away and the teacher is your mother. My sisters and brother are my only classmates. I'm the only one in my grade. I kind of have to be responsible for getting my work done. We study and take required tests.

What happens if you don't do well on a test?

I haven't ever done bad on a test. I guess if I didn't pass a test, I would get a talk from my mother.

Have you been doing anything else?

I volunteer at Horse Power, which is a riding center. It's for kids with disabilities or who are in wheelchairs, so they can learn to ride horses. Sometimes I lead the horses, and sometimes I walk beside the horse and help the kids keep their balance and learn how to ride.

What are you looking forward to this year?

I'm looking forward to going to Italy. That's why I've been studying Italian. So that when I get there, hopefully I'll know some stuff. My Girl Scout troop* is going. There are thirteen girls going; my sister is going too. We thought it would be cool* to go to a different country and see what they have there, like all the art and history over there. We have two adult leaders going with us.

How are you getting money for the trip?

We've been working toward this for two years. We raise funds by selling flowers in the spring and fall and wreaths* at Christmas. We had a spaghetti dinner* and car washes.* And we sell Girl Scout cookies* of course.

Is there anything you'd like to say to kids in other countries?

I hope you are OK over there and having a good time. I hope you are doing good.

A Few Words

Home schooled: About two percent of students in the U.S. do not attend regular schools but are taught at home by their parents instead.

Girl Scout troop: Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts are programs for young people. Scouts learn lots of practical skills and do service projects in their communities. A group of scouts is called a troop.

Cool: A slang word that means "great" or "exciting."

Wreaths: A Christmas decoration that people hang on the doors of their houses.

Spaghetti dinner: This is a way that groups earn money in the U.S. They cook a meal and people pay to eat dinner.

Car wash: This is a popular way for groups of young people to earn money in the U.S. People pay them to wash cars on a Saturday.

Girl Scout cookies: For many, many years, Girls Scouts all over the U.S. have sold boxes of cookies in the spring to get money for their programs. "Girl Scout cookies" have become part of American culture.

Discussion Questions

1. Casey is home schooled. She studies regular schoolbooks but her mother is her only teacher. What do you think might be good and bad about home schooling?
2. Does it seem unusual that Casey helps people who cannot walk learn how to ride horses? Have you seen people with disabilities do other unexpected things?



Aidan, 14

I met Aidan and his brother while they were helping serve dinner to a group of poor people in our city.

What have you been doing this week?

Skateboarding and hanging out* with my friends. It's spring break.* Me and my friends* walked to McDonald's.* I'm trying to get a job there right now. I dropped job applications at like six of them, everywhere.

Your dad is in Afghanistan. How do you feel about that?

I don't really like having him over there. I miss him a lot. I guess most people think it's special having a dad overseas, but it's not. It's really hard, and I don't get to see him a lot. When he comes home, we eat out* a lot. We spend money. We play Call of Duty a lot (that's a video game), my brother and my dad and me. We work out* together.

Do you worry about him?

All the time. I try to keep him in my prayers. I call him when I can and talk to him.

Why are you here helping feed homeless people today?

My mom didn't tell me about this until about 2:00 when she said, "We're going to go feed a bunch of people" and I was like,* "OK."

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Hmm. Fulfill your dreams. Don't stop.

A Few Words

Hanging out: Sitting and talking to friends. This is informal English.

Spring break: A short vacation from school.

Me and my friends: At school, students are taught to say "my friends and I" but many young people say "me and my friends."

McDonald's: A famous group of fast-food restaurants.

Eat out: This means "eat in a restaurant."

Work out: Here this means "exercise, strengthen your muscles."

I was like: Young people often say "I was like" instead of "I said." It is informal and is used in speech, not writing.

Discussion Questions

1. Aidan enjoys activities with his dad when his dad is not in Afghanistan. What do you enjoy doing with your dad?
2. Aidan hopes that you will reach your dreams. What are your dreams for the future?



Lilac, 16

I met Lilac while she was working at a fast-food restaurant.

What have you been doing this week?

Swimming. I'm on the school swim team and we just won conference.* First place! It's like the third most intense meet* of the whole season, and we won.

What's happening at school?

We just had exams, midterms,* and it was crazy.* Now I have SATs* coming up and I've got to take SATs classes.

Is there anything else coming up?

My birthday is in two months and I'll be seventeen and I'm going to buy a car. It's an 89 Toyota with four wheel drive and 33x12.50 tires and four-inch lifters and a roll bar.* I have to pay for it myself. I have to pay for the insurance, which is expensive, but I don't mind. I work and I've been saving for it.

Do you like working here?

I get paid to smile and talk to people. I like this job. It's fun. The bosses train us to do second mile* service. They teach us the best ways to talk to the customers. We have to say, "How may I serve you?" not "Can I help you?" and when we carry something for our customer we always say, "I'll carry this for you" not "May I carry this for you?" because people don't like to ask for help.

What are you looking forward to this year?

Well, next year I have to make some big decisions. After high school I might train to be a CNA* and an EMT* and join the Air Force, or I could commit to the Army and they would pay for me to train as a nurse. Right now I'm an explorer at the Fire Academy, where we learn about being a firefighter and an EMT. I get to ride along on the rescue and fire trucks and learn what they do.

Is there anything you'd like to say to kids in other countries?

Hey! What's up?*

A Few Words

Conference: A group of schools that compete against each other in sports.

Meet: Swimming competitions are usually called meets.

Midterms: Tests that happen in the middle of a school term. Tests at the end of the term are called finals.

Crazy: Young people often say "crazy" when they mean "very busy, lots of work to do."

SAT: A very important test for students who want to go to university. SAT stands for Scholastic Aptitude Test.

Lifters and roll bar: This equipment and very big tires allow the car to travel on very bad roads or places without roads.

Second mile: The phrase "second mile" means doing more than you have to. It comes from a saying of Jesus when he taught that we should help other people, including people that we don't like. Sometimes the phrase is "go the extra mile."

CNA: Certified Nursing Assistant

EMT: Emergency Medical Technician

What's up?: This is the usual way that young Americans say hello to each other. It means "What is happening? How are you?"

Discussion Questions

1. Lilac is working and saving her money so that she can buy a car, and she knows exactly the kind of car that she wants. What would you like to buy? (Please describe it very clearly.) Why do you want to buy it?
2. Lilac seems to want a very active life, and she wants to do work that only men did in the past. Does this seem good to you? Do you think that working in the Army, the Air Force, or the fire department would be a good career for her? For you? Why?



Brian, 14

What have you been doing this week?

I've been having parties lately, like baby showers and stuff. I've been studying a lot. I've been playing ball with the neighbors, basketball.

Why have you been having baby showers?

Because we just had a little baby. He was born on Easter.* He's cute. He was born early, because he was supposed to be born on May 2. He's the smallest thing I've ever seen. He's like a doll. He weighs just a little bit more than five pounds.*

So you didn't have a usual kind of Easter, did you?

No, we took Mom to the hospital. She went in about 1:00 am and the baby came at about 10:00 pm. I stayed home and take care* of the little kids with my brother and uncle. We cleaned the house to surprise mom.

Please explain what a baby shower is.

It's when you have a party for a woman who is pregnant, and they bring gifts like diapers and baby food and clothes. We did games for the adults. We played Spanish music for the people to dance. We made some hamburgers and hot dogs* and passed out cake.

What classes are you taking?

Science, social studies, math, language arts, reading lab, guided studies, that's when they help you study, and health.

What languages do you speak at home?

Spanish and English.* With my brother, I speak English because we are used to English, but with my mom, I speak Spanish. With my dad, I speak both. We talk both languages, really. I was born in Puerto Rico, and I was about seven when we came to the mainland U.S. I didn't speak English. We were in Wisconsin, and there aren't a lot of Spanish speakers in Wisconsin. The teachers would take me out of class to learn English.

Is there anything that you are looking forward to doing this summer?

We'll probably go to Myrtle Beach this summer. It's a whole family trip. We go to the beach or hang out at the pool at the hotel. We go out to eat and to the fun park. It has roller coasters and stuff.

Next Friday is the eighth grade dance. It's like a prom* but for eighth graders.* You take a date.* You dress in a suit,* and you go to the dance and have fun there. They'll have music and a DJ.*

Is there anything that you'd like to say to kids in other countries?

I hope you follow your dreams and never stop believing or trying.

A Few Words

Easter: A very important celebration for Christians. It always comes on a Sunday in the spring.

Five pounds: About 2.25 kilograms.

Take care: This is a "slip of the tongue." Brian meant to say "took care of."

Hot dogs: A popular kind of sausage sandwich.

Spanish and English: Brian's family, like almost 50 million Americans, is Hispanic. He was born in Puerto Rico, and his family speaks both English and Spanish.

Prom: Most high schools in the U.S. have a special, formal dance party for the students who graduate. It is called a prom.

Eighth graders: Students in their eighth year of school. They are usually thirteen or fourteen years old.

Date: When a boy asks a girl to go to a party with him, she is his "date" for the evening.

Suit: Formal men's clothing, such as what a businessman wears.

DJ: This stands for disc jockey and means the person who chooses and plays the music, often for a radio program but also for parties.

Discussion Questions

1. When was the most recent time a new baby came to your family? How did your family and friends celebrate?
2. How did you learn English? What were the first English words that you learned? Do you enjoy learning English, or is it difficult and uninteresting for you?



Caroline, 14

There is a place in our city where poor people get a free meal every day. Caroline's father organizes the meal six times a year. I think you will enjoy some of the vocabulary in this interview.

What have you been doing this week?

I've been grounded.* My report card* was so bad that I hid it from my parents. Then the school mailed another one. I was at my grandmother's house, and my dad came and got me. I can't do guitar lessons or hang out* with my friends or go on the computer. I'm grounded from* the internet.

How long are you grounded for?

Until my grades* get better.

Are you studying hard?

Yeah. I have no choice. That's the only thing I can do now. I have to study.

What are you doing here today?

Every two months I come here with my family. I like it. We feed people who are homeless or who have been in jail. I serve and help make food.

What classes are you taking at school?

Uh, English, world history, art, earth and environmental science, Algebra 1, PE,* and health.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Don't do drugs.* I've seen people do drugs, and it's bad. Study hard.

A Few Words

Grounded: When young American people do something wrong, their parents often tell them, "For a week (or a month) you cannot go anywhere except school and home." Young people say that they are "grounded." *Grounded* is the word for an airplane that cannot fly, and young people who must stay home feel like they are airplanes that cannot fly.

Report card: The piece of paper that tells how well or poorly a student is doing in school.

Hang out: Sit and talk to friends. This is informal English.

Grounded from: If a young person is not allowed to use a computer, telephone, or television, they say that they are "grounded from" the computer, the telephone, or the television.

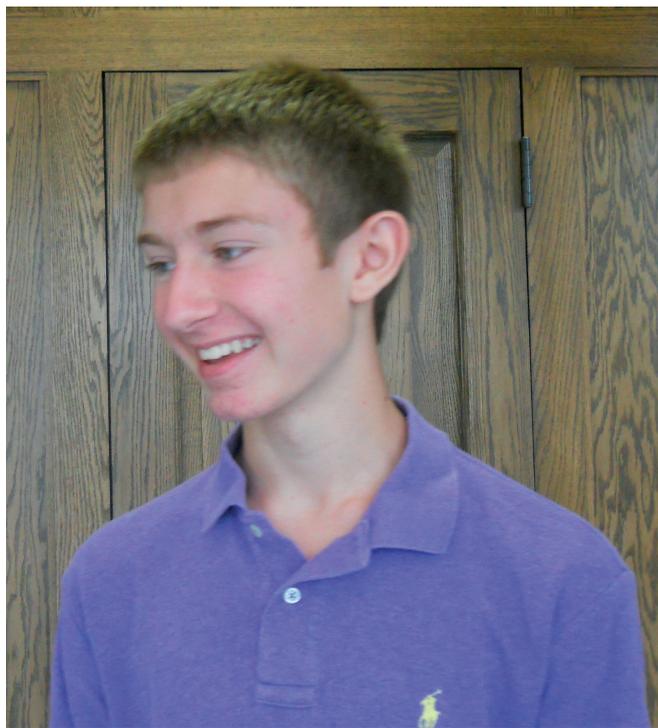
Grades: Americans say "grades." British people say "marks."

PE: Physical education, a sports and exercise class.

Do drugs: In informal English, people "do drugs" instead of "use drugs."

Discussion Questions

1. In your country, what do parents usually do if a young person doesn't study hard or doesn't do well in school?
2. When you feel tired and don't want to study, what do you do?



Caleb, 14

This interview made me smile. Caleb and his friends enjoyed doing something that made them feel sick.

What have you been doing this week?

I want to talk about what I did two weeks ago. Is that OK?

Well, sure. What did you do two weeks ago?

Two weeks ago I went to Disney World* in Florida. It was for our eighth grade trip, about 200 kids went, and we went for four days. We went by bus, and it was a thirteen-hour trip to get there, and a thirteen-hour trip to get back.

What did you do there?

On the first day we went to Epcot Center, and they do a lot of scientific research and stuff,* so we learned about chemistry there, and we rode on the GM* test track and saw some cars like water-powered cars and solar-powered cars.

The second day we went to the Hall of Presidents at Disney World, and they had these robots, like models of the presidents, that moved and talked, and they were the same height as the real presidents and the same shoe size and everything. It was cool.* The robots talked about the history of America. It was about the difficulties we went through in the past and how the presidents dealt with it. And they talked about the Civil War,* and Abraham Lincoln* talked then, and talked about how slavery was wrong.

What else did you do?

The third day we went to the Animal Kingdom and rode on a new ride. It's called Everest, like Mt. Everest.* It's a roller coaster. It goes like forty miles an hour, and it goes backwards part of the way, and a Yeti* pops up. We rode that thing like eighteen times. We just rode it all day. One of my friends threw up* everywhere, so we took a bus back to where we were staying. I roomed with three people, and our room was connected to a room with three more boys and one of my friends' dad, and three of the seven people on the bus ride threw up. It was a crazy bus ride. That night people were sick. It was from riding Everest.

On the fourth day we went to MGM, and they closed a section of the roller coaster and made it so it was just for the eighth graders. It was awesome.* They closed down that part of the park for us and that was the most fun, and we rode it all day. Then we came home on the bus, and it was 6:00 in the morning and our parents came to get us. We slept on the bus.

Is there anything you'd like to say to kids in other countries?

I hope you get to go to Disney World someday.

A Few Words

Disney World: Disney World, Epcot Center, Animal Kingdom, and MGM are all parts of a very large and famous amusement park.

Stuff: This is an informal word for "things."

GM: General Motors, a major American car manufacturer.

Cool: This is a slang word for "good" or "interesting."

Civil War: There was a war between the northern and southern parts of the U.S. from 1861 to 1865. Before the Civil War, some people in the U.S. had slaves.

Abraham Lincoln: He was president during the Civil War.

Mt. Everest: This is the English name for the highest mountain in the world.

Yeti: A monster man that some people say lives in the mountains.

Throw up: This is an informal phrase for "vomit."

Awesome: This is a slang word for "very good" or "wonderful."

Discussion Questions

1. Caleb and his friends got sick because of the movement of the roller coaster (motion sickness). Do you or people that you know get sick from riding in a car or bus on curving roads? When and where did it happen? Do you think you would enjoy the roller coaster, like Caleb and his friends, or would you stay away from it?
2. Where would you like to go on a fun trip with your friends? What would you do there? How would you have fun?



Landry, 14

What have you been doing this week?

Well, school every day, and then after school my friend drives me home and normally* I go to her house and we do our homework together, and then I go home after that and eat dinner with my family.

Did you do anything extra or different this week?

Also this week I was driving with the driver education teacher to get my learner's permit.

Please tell what a learner's permit is.

It's for driving a car. First I had to take three weeks of classes, four hours a day, four days a week, to study for the book test. Then the big written test is 200 questions. Then you have to drive for six hours with an instructor. Then when you're fifteen years old, you can have a learner's permit.

What can you do with a learner's permit?

You can drive anytime during the day until 9:00 pm with an adult in the car with you. The adult has to have a driving license for five years. Then when you are sixteen years old, you can get your driving license.

What do you do on weekends?

Sunday I go to church and youth group.*
On Friday nights I normally have a sleepover with friends.

What is a sleepover?

I go over to a friend's house and stay there the night. We talk girl talk. We eat popcorn, watch movies, and talk about boys. Pretty much* what every girl does.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Just "Hey,"* I guess.

A Few Words

Normally: This is a synonym for "usually."

Youth group: In the U.S., churches, temples, and mosques often have a meeting once a week that is just for young people.

Pretty much: In this sentence, "pretty much" means "about the same as."

Hey: In the southern part of the United States, people often say "hey" instead of "hi." People speak English in slightly different ways in different parts of the U.S.

Discussion Questions

1. In the U.S., getting a driver's license is a very important and exciting event for young people. It means that they are beginning to be adults and that they can have a little more freedom and independence than children have. Are there special events in a teenager's life in your culture that show you are becoming an adult? What are they?
2. In the U.S., girls often stay all night at the home of their girlfriends on Friday or Saturday night. Their mothers supervise them. Where do young people in your country get together to talk with their friends? Who supervises them? (*Supervise* means watch and be sure nothing bad happens.)



Walker, 15

What have you been doing this week?

This was the last week of school for us.

Did you do anything to celebrate the last day of school?

A couple of us went to the movies after the last day. We went to see a movie called *The Losers*. It's kind of like an action movie.

What are you going to do this summer?

I'm going to New Orleans. It's a Habitat for Humanity* trip. We'll be building a house and also, like,* sightseeing. I think there are thirteen of us kids and then there's parents. We'll be there a week. And then there's the swim team.

Tell me about the swim team.

We have our first meet* on Saturday and then another on Tuesday. I swim backstroke and butterfly the best. We practice every day, unless weather conditions won't let us. We have meets every weekend all summer till the beginning of August.

Are you planning anything else?

My dad and I are going to Boy Scout* summer camp. This is like my fifth time. I'm going to be doing archery and a couple other merit badges.* We stay in Adirondacks. They got three sides, a roof, and an open front. We go to a big mess hall* for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And there are lots of Indian-themed* things. There's a big lake and we go swimming. There are also, like, a lot of sports and stuff.

What is your dad going to do?

He's going to be herding* children basically. He's going to be one of the main dads for the troop,* making sure we don't get hurt and stuff.

Is there anything else that you like to do?

I really like music mostly now. I'm trying to learn to play the piano. That's going to be hard. I already play the trumpet.

Is there anything you'd like to say to kids in other countries?

Hello, from America!

A Few Words

Habitat for Humanity: An organization that helps low-income people build simple and good houses for their families. Because volunteers do most of the work, the cost of the houses is low.

Like: Many young people use the word *like* to fill time while they are thinking of the next word they want to say. Their parents and teachers tell them that this is a bad habit. Walker often uses *like*.

Meet: A swimming competition is called a swimming meet.

Boy Scouts: An international program for boys. It emphasizes doing things outdoors and learning practical skills.

Merit badges: When a Boy Scout learns a new skill, he gets a small patch called a merit badge to wear.

Mess hall: *Mess* is a military word for "meal," and a "mess hall" is a place where people eat.

Indian: In the U.S., Boy Scouts learn about the first people who lived here, the Native Americans, who are sometimes called Indians. In this sentence, the word doesn't mean "from India."

Herding: This word usually means taking care of animals (herding sheep or herding goats, for example). Probably Walker and his dad have been joking about his dad's work at the camp.

Troop: A group of Boy Scouts is called a troop.

Discussion Questions

1. Habitat for Humanity is one way that people can help their neighbors. What are some of the ways people in your community help their neighbors?
2. Walker says that learning to play the piano is going to be hard for him. What is, for you, the hardest thing you are learning to do now? Why are you learning it?



Hannah, 18

So, what have you been doing this week?

Well, Sunday I went to church and I called my friend Shelby. I was going to go by myself, but she said her parents had left for church without her, so we went together. After church, we went to the store and got food and ate outside in the park, and that was really beautiful.

I've gone to school all week. After school I went to work a couple of days. I work at a retirement community.

Maybe you should explain what a retirement community is.

OK. It's like a big neighborhood with rich old people. It's a nice place to stay, and it has an assisted living section for people who need nurses. It's really fun, but it's hard work too. I work in the dining room. I really enjoy working with elderly people. Some of them are my friends. Not all the time, but sometimes you can tell you bless* them just by being there.

What else have you been doing?

I started track this week. The track season started two months ago, but two of the girls got hurt, so the coach asked if I would run. Everyone else was in shape,* so I was running and inside going "Uh ow!"

That was Friday, so then I went to my second job to waitress at a Japanese restaurant. It was really busy, so I pretty much worked my butt off,* 'cause* you have to clean and a lot of things. A friend

picked me up and we went to her house for a birthday party after work. We ate way too much ice cream and stayed up way too late because I had to get up early Saturday morning and go to school to help with landscaping* for community service.

At my school, a certain number of hours of community service are required each year, so I choose things I like. I had a really good time, as much fun as you can have weeding and mowing and potting flowers. I killed my back* because I had to go between the cracks of the bricks in the sidewalk and clean out moss. It was kind of hard. I went home, took a nap, and then I went to work again at the Japanese place.

So you are really busy. Do you enjoy your life?

Yeah, I do. Sometimes I don't like being so busy. Today I couldn't go to church because I had to go to work at 11:00. So I got a teaching tape* and some food and got back in bed and listened to the tape and ate breakfast in bed. I copied part of Psalm 146* onto a card and put it in my pocket when I went to work. Because it blessed me tons.* 'Cause everything is better when you're focused on God and not on yourself.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

I hope the people who read this won't think I'm lazy or anything.

I really don't think they will.

A Few Words

Bless: In this sentence, *bless* means "make someone happy" or "show someone a little bit of God's love."

In shape: Here this means that a person is healthy and strong and can do hard work or sports.

Work your butt off: An idiom that means "work really, really hard." The word *butt* is short for *buttocks*. This is an informal phrase and should not be used in formal writing or speaking.

'Cause: Short for *because* and used in informal speech.

Landscaping: The job of arranging and taking care of flowers and bushes around a building.

Killed my back: Here this means "made my back hurt" or "used my muscles in a really hard way."

Teaching tape: A cassette tape with a talk from a teacher on it.

Psalm 146: This is a part of the Bible. Psalms are poems and are often read by Christians, Muslims, and Jews.

Tons: Here this means "a lot" or "much." A ton is 2,000 pounds of weight.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about the community service that students at Hannah's school must do? Have you done community service work? What kind of community service work would you like to do? Why?
2. If a group of girls, or a group of boys, gets together for a small party in your country, what do they usually do? (Hannah and her friends ate ice cream and stayed awake until very late.) When was your favorite party? What did you do?



James, 15

What have you been doing this week?

I've been going to school. I'm taking art, world history, Spanish, geometry, English, and earth science. They are all honors classes,* except Spanish. There are no honors classes in Spanish.

What are you doing in art class?

We learn how to draw things. We learn how to hold pencils and get different shades. I'm drawing a tiger right now. We also learn to use pastels* and paint.

Is it your favorite class?

Yes.

Have you been doing anything else?

Hanging out with my friend Clare. I always wrestle her little brother. I sleep a lot really. And I eat a lot. It doesn't show though.

Are you growing a lot? Teenage boys often eat and sleep a lot because they're growing a lot.

I've been growing for quite a while now.

Is there anything happening at school?

We have been having midterms. They're the middle-of-the-year tests. The tests are hard, especially in honors classes.

Is there anything that you are looking forward to?

Summer. My family is going to California. I have a mother and a father and a little sister. My mother says she is sick and tired of* staying in the house, so we're hitting up Cali.* We'll go to Los Angeles. I'm just sort of going along with* whatever my mom says.

What do you want to do after high school?

Go to college. I want to study health sciences or medicine. I think I can earn a lot of money that way. I'd like to do sports medicine.*

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

Wazzup?*

A Few Words

Honors classes: These classes are for the best students.

Pastels: A kind of colored chalk for making pictures.

Sick and tired of: This is informal language. If you are sick and tired of doing something, it means that you have done it for a long time and want to do something new and different.

Hitting up Cali: This is informal language. It means "going to California."

Sort of going along with: This is also informal language. It means that James's mother is making decisions and he is following her ideas.

Sports medicine: This is taking care of the injuries that people get when they are playing sports, such as injured muscles.

Wazzup?: This comes from the question "What is up?" and means "What is happening?" It is the informal way that young people say hello to each other.

Discussion Questions

1. Is there anything that you are "sick and tired of"? What is it? Why is it part of your life?
2. No one knows what will happen in the future. Maybe you will have an opportunity to earn a lot of money. If you earn a lot of money in the future, what do you think you will do with the money?



Hunter, 14

What have you been doing this week?

I bought a ukulele.* I'm studying for exams, and I'm playing the drums.

Where do you play drums?

At my house. I have lessons there. A teacher comes to my house.

Why are you learning to play drums?

I just think it's a cool instrument to learn. I like funk* and rock music. Funk is just so upbeat.*

Why did you buy a ukulele?

Because I'd like to learn how to play. We play Jamaican* music. I've heard lots of it and I thought it would be fun to learn how to play it.

Is there anything that you are looking forward to?

This summer I'm going to Puerto Rico.* We visit there a lot because my mom is from there. We visit family and have vacation there. My grandfather, my dad's dad, will visit us there. My sister is in college now. She'll go with us.

Do you like Puerto Rico?

It's very nice and tropical. They have nice beaches. I like the fruit they have, the different foods. I really like plátanos.*

What do you hope to do after high school?

I'd like to go to college and later get my Ph.D.* I've thought about studying U.S. history. I want to be a professor when I grow up. I'd like to be a teacher, and I like history.

Is there anything that you would like to say to kids in other countries?

To just work hard in school.

A Few Words

Ukulele: This is a musical instrument that looks like a small guitar. It was first played in Hawaii.

Funk music: A kind of music that was especially popular in the 1960s and 1970s.

Upbeat: Cheerful, happy.

Jamaica: An island in the Caribbean Sea, south and east of the U.S.

Puerto Rico: Another Caribbean island. The people of Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens. The main language of Puerto Rico is Spanish.

Plátanos: These are very similar to bananas. People cook them.

Ph.D.: This means Doctor of Philosophy and is the most advanced university degree in the U.S.

Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of things make you feel upbeat? Why?
2. What are you looking forward to doing this summer? Why?



Haley, 17

What have you been doing this week?

Well, mostly all of my days start with getting up at 6:30 and going to the pool to practice with my year-round swim team. At 8:00 I head over to* another pool to coach a swim team. That's one of my part-time jobs. I finish at 11:00 and get home around 11:30 or so. Usually I go home and eat lunch and get my relaxation for the day.

What do you do in the afternoons?

After lunch I usually go back to the pool either to lifeguard or to hang out* with friends. I love to catch a minute, if I can, to read. After that I usually do dinner* with the family; that's from 5:00 to 6:00. At 6:00 I head back to the pool. I coach a night practice. After practice, like 9-ish,* I spend time with the family. We play Wii* or watch a movie. Between 10:00 and 11:00, probably, I'll check the computer, talk on the phone with my friend, and head to bed. Full days.

What do you do on the weekends?

On the weekend, I usually have Saturday off. I like to get out with my friends, go shopping, just relax. It's nice not to be at the pool. On Sunday I usually go to church and do lunch with the family and just hang out.

You said you like to read. What kinds of things do you like to read?

This summer I'm doing a class for school next year. It's called *We the People*.* I'm actually reading constitutional books. Sounds dull, but I find it interesting. We read about how the constitution was written and the deeper meaning of it. If I get any free time in the middle of the day, I sleep. Those early mornings make me tired.

Is there anything you'd like to say to kids in other countries?

Hmmm. Don't close yourself off. Take advantage of all the opportunities you have. Have a full life. Don't think you can't learn more. I think I learn something more nearly every day.

A Few Words

Head over to: An informal way to say "leave one place and go to another one." Notice that Haley also says "head back to" and "head to bed."

Hang out: A very informal way to say "talk to and enjoy being with friends without doing anything special or exciting."

Do dinner: "Do dinner" or "do lunch" is a casual way to say "eat dinner" and "eat lunch."

-ish: A very useful suffix in informal American English. People use it to say that something is not exact or precise. "Nine-ish" (or "9-ish") means "about nine o'clock." A "tall-ish man" is a little bit tall, but not very tall.

Wii: A kind of video game system.

We the People: These are the first words at the beginning of the U.S. Constitution. The complete sentence is: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

Discussion Questions

1. Haley is using her summer vacation to practice her sport, to earn money by teaching her sport, and to study for a class for next year. If you could have the perfect summer, what would you choose to do?
2. Haley's mother and father play video games together with their children. Does your family have a game or other activity that you like to do together? What is it?

Possible Activities

FOR THE TEACHER: SOME POSSIBLE CLASS ACTIVITIES

No one knows your class and your students better than you do. As the class instructor, you will of course rely on your professional evaluation of your students' needs when deciding how to use these materials. The following suggestions are intended only as ideas that may prompt your own creativity in using these interviews.

A FEW WORDS

The *A Few Words* section of the materials is not called *Vocabulary* because students might think that the label *Vocabulary* means that these are important words to learn. Often they are not. They are simply words and expressions that might not be in your dictionary. Your students may want to add the informal and slang expressions to their own vocabularies, but other things, such as the explanations of names and activities in American culture, may not be important to them. You may find that you need to give these words to students before they listen to some of the recordings, but students' listening skills will improve more quickly if they do not read the entire written interview before or while listening to the recordings for the first time.

LISTENING

In the past, language teachers often believed that listening is a one-directional activity. They assumed that learners develop listening skills by becoming familiar with the sounds and words of a language and then build up their understanding by putting the words together. This approach is often called "bottom-up" listening, and it is important.

Now we know, however, that listening skills also involve "top-down" processing and are often interactive. Top-down processing means that listeners use their understanding of the topic and their ability to logically guess what a speaker is likely to say next in order to follow and understand speech. In top-down listening, we encourage students to gather meaning even when they can't understand every word or detail.

We also recognize that much of our listening is interactive. While it is true that we listen to such things as lectures, televised news reports, and films without speaking, much of our language use is in conversation. We listen and then respond by speaking.

The interviews here can be used to encourage the development of these multiple listening skills.

Listening to authentic speech

These interviews were not recorded live: the young people are reading written transcripts of interviews. However, the interviews are natural English because they are the real words of real kids and were read aloud by real kids using their natural accents and sense of inflection. In many cases, the voice belongs to the young person who was originally interviewed. Remind your students that these recordings may not seem as simple and easy as the English in some of their textbooks because it is real English and, therefore, very good listening practice. People speak English with many accents, and these interviews will help our students learn to adjust to new ones when they hear them.

Top-down listening

Students can listen for the overall structure of an interview as it is played straight through once or twice. The teacher gives a general question to focus student attention on the main topics. Sample questions:

What topics are discussed in the interview?

What do you learn about the interests and personality of this young person?

After listening to this interview, what is something that you would like to ask this young person?

The first and last questions are the same in each interview, but what other questions are asked? Together as a class or working in pairs or small groups, students can create a list of the questions that they heard and then listen again to check their list for accuracy.

Bottom-up listening

Students can listen for answers to specific questions about the interview. Sample questions:

From the interview with Andrew: What is a tomahawk? What kind of a dog does Andrew own? How does Andrew travel to school?

From the interview with Jasmine: What is Jasmine's favorite subject? Which subject is her least favorite? Why does she like living in Oakland?

Interactive listening

The discussion questions are, of course, an opportunity to practice speaking skills, but students can be reminded that listening to their partner or small group in a discussion is an important part of developing listening skills too. Sample activities:

Assign one student in each group to serve as secretary and write notes on their small group's discussion. Assign another student to report to the whole class the major points raised in the discussion. Rotate assignments throughout the course.

For the interview with Amy: Amy gave a bit of advice. What advice would you like to give Amy?

For the interview with Landry: Survey students at your school and prepare a report on the results of your survey. What do students think are the most important signs that a young person is becoming an adult?

American Teens Talk!

For a classroom with limited resources

If your classroom does not have electricity or a way to play sound recordings, you can still practice listening. You might have two students prepare one of the interviews and then read it (as often as needed) to the class. You could also recruit another English speaker to read the interview with you to your students.

READING

Like listening, reading is both a top-down and a bottom-up activity. We find the meaning of a text both by putting together our understanding of words and syntax (bottom-up) and by using our background knowledge of the subject and our ability to follow the organization of the text (top-down). Much reading theory suggests that our students will read best if they develop or activate a schema before reading, ask questions as they read, and connect the text to their lives after reading.

Activate schema

Because these interviews follow a consistent pattern, students can easily predict how an interview will be organized. The photo shows whether the interview is with a girl or a boy. The first and last questions are always the same. The body of the interview includes follow-up questions about the activities mentioned in the answer to the first interview question (What have you been doing this week?). Encourage students to use this organizational pattern to predict what they are likely to read. For example, you could stop after reading or hearing the answer to the first question and predict what topics will be discussed later in the interview.

Ask questions and read actively

Encourage students to guess the meaning of new phrases and words. Encourage them to predict what the answer to an interview question will be. Encourage students to form an idea about the personality of the young person as they read an interview.

Connect the text to oneself and one's world

Ask: How is the young person similar to you or someone you know? What about this young person's life is similar to yours? What is different? Do you think you would enjoy getting to know this person? What question would you like to ask him or her? What advice would you like to give?

For a classroom with limited resources

If you are unable to obtain copies of the interviews for all of your students, several of the interviews are short enough to be copied onto a chalkboard or onto a large sheet of paper and saved for repeated use.

SPEAKING

In order to become English speakers, students need opportunities to communicate their own ideas in English, to choose the ideas they want to express, and to choose the words that they want to use to express these ideas. When doing this, students will not speak "perfect" English, but the mistakes they make are a necessary part of learning a language. No one has ever learned to use a language without making mistakes. Often these mistakes are simply a sign that human beings are intelligent

and creative and must experiment with words before they can become fluent in expressing their ideas. In addition, students need opportunities for different kinds of speaking. We use language a little differently when we speak formally before a group and when we speak informally in conversations.

Speaking informally

The discussion questions at the end of each interview are intended as prompts for conversation. Because the questions after each interview are different, students will have opportunities to speak about many different topics and use a wide range of vocabulary. If your class is comfortable doing small group work, these questions should work well. If your students do not have experience with small group work, especially if your class is very large, you may want to begin with pair work so that students do not need to leave their seats. You can increase the likelihood that they will discuss the question instead of gossiping in their first language if you randomly call on some pairs to report what they discussed.

If you prefer to call on individual students to answer questions, consider using the *Think, Pair, Share* technique that was invented by Frank Lyman. This technique was developed to increase the amount of thinking that students do in class, and it also works very well for language teachers in increasing the amount of speaking practice that students get. In step one, *Think*, the teacher asks a question and waits for a few moments while students think about their answer. The students are not allowed to raise their hands or in any other way ask to be called on. In step two, *Pair*, students turn to one other person, state their answer to the question, and listen to their partner's answer. In step three, *Share*, the teacher has students share their answer to the question with the larger group. This may be by calling on different students in a traditional way to state their answer to the class, by having students write on the chalkboard or in their copy books, or by having students do something different such as draw a picture, make a chart, or do a role play. Language learners especially benefit from this technique because it allows all students to practice speaking without taking large amounts of class time, and it allows students to rehearse their answer before stating it before the whole class.

Speaking formally

Interviews are a fairly formal form of language use. Students may be interviewed when applying for a job or for university admission, and they will see political and business leaders as well as celebrities interviewed on television. You could help students practice this use of language in several ways. For example, students could, perhaps in pairs, write interview questions and then interview classmates on different topics. If the interviews are done in front of the whole class, students will get very authentic practice with speaking in a formal situation.

Students could prepare and videotape interviews, editing them carefully before presenting them to the class. While this is still formal speech, it may be less stressful for students than a live interview in front of classmates would be.

WRITING

As we have all experienced, one of the most difficult things about writing is having something to say. Our students usually produce better writing if we provide them with an opportunity for reading and discussion before they begin to write.

American Teens Talk!

The discussion questions after each interview include at least one question that could be used as a writing prompt for a paragraph. If students have read and/or listened to the interview and have talked with their classmates about the discussion questions, it will be easier for them to produce a good paragraph. During a class discussion, you may want to write on the chalkboard words and phrases that arise and could be useful to students as they write.

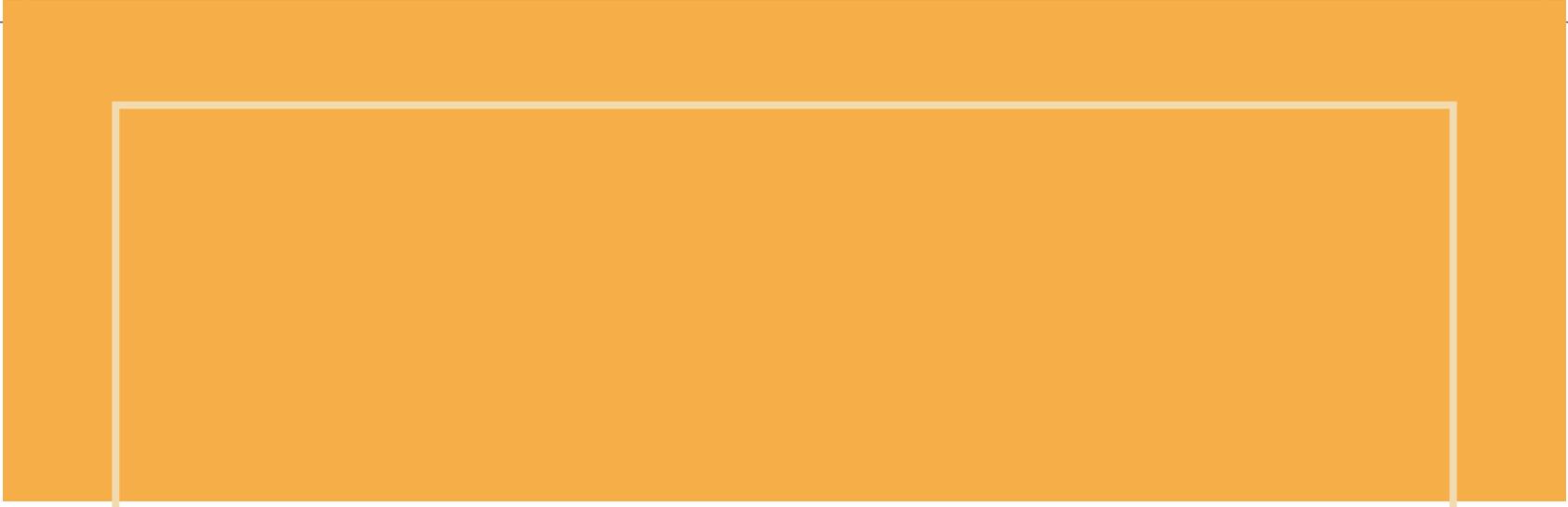
It is also helpful if at least some student writing can be “published” in some way. Students, of course, tend to see the teacher as the most important audience for their writing, but if they have a larger audience too, writing tends to improve. One simple way to publish student work is to read it aloud to the class, being careful to correct any errors so that the student is not embarrassed and the class can concentrate on meaning rather than form. Posting writing on classroom walls or bulletin boards is another way to create a larger audience and give recognition to writers. If you decide to publish work, it is important that the writing of all students, not just the best students, is treated with respect.

If you have access to a photocopier, students could prepare a booklet of interviews on the ordinary life of ordinary kids in their own country to share with visitors from other countries and cultures, giving them experience with more formal and cooperative writing.

DEVELOPING MULTIPLE SKILLS WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

A dictogloss, first created by Ruth Wajnryb, is a very useful activity for practicing multiple skills while using very limited resources. In a dictogloss, the teacher selects a short reading passage (a three- to five-sentence answer to one of the interview questions would work quite well) and reads it to the class twice, at normal speaking speed. (Playing the recording could work very well too.) During the first reading, students simply listen. During the second reading, they take notes, but because the reading is at normal speaking speed, they cannot write down everything they hear. Students then talk together in pairs or very small groups, use their notes, and try to write the passage down so that it is complete and has the same meaning as the original, using their knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and top-down organizational patterns to help them. After they have completed their work, students have an opportunity to share their reconstruction with the class and to compare their version with the original.

A dictogloss requires very little equipment. For the teacher, it is helpful but not absolutely necessary to have a chalkboard or large piece of paper for showing students the original reading after they have created their reconstructions. For students, all that is needed is something to write on and something to write with. Nonetheless, in completing a dictogloss, students must listen, write, speak, read, and use their knowledge of both English syntax and English vocabulary to finish the task.



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