

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

## EDUCATION GUIDE



**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS  
COMPANION CURRICULUM TO**

*i am a girl*

DIRECTED BY REBECCA BARRY



## INTRODUCTION

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

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

## I AM A GIRL

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

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

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

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



### **AZIZA (AFGHANISTAN)**

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



### **BREANI (USA)**

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



### **HABIBA (CAMEROON)**

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



### **KATIE (AUSTRALIA)**

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



### **KIMSEY (CAMBODIA)**

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



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

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

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



# G!RL BE HEARD

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

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

7 out of 10 girls have or will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime.<sup>2</sup> 34% of girls in our country will become pregnant before the age of 20.<sup>3</sup> And for far too many girls in the United States and around the world, the threat of being trafficked is all too real.

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> “United Nations Secretary-General’s Campaign to UNITE To End Violence Against Women.” UN News Center. UN, n.d. Web. 09 Feb. 2015.

<sup>3</sup> “Teen Sexuality and Pregnancy.” Teen Sexuality and Pregnancy. University of Nevada, 05 Nov. 2004. Web. 04 Mar. 2015.



## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

The United Nations adopted Resolution 66/170 to declare October 11 International Day of the Girl, exemplifying that global leaders are finally ready to take action, prioritize, and focus attention on girls. There is no better time to engage youth in exploring these critical human rights issues that are impacting the almost one billion young and adolescent girls worldwide.<sup>4</sup>

We live in a world where:

- Up to 7 in 10 women around the world experience physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime<sup>5</sup>
- 62 million girls of primary school age are not in school<sup>6</sup>
- 100 million girls are missing due to female prenatal sex selection<sup>7</sup>
- Three quarters of the world's HIV sufferers under age twenty-five are women<sup>8</sup>

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

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

female voices are heard as clearly and as loudly as those of males. Out of 195 countries, only 22 are led by women<sup>9</sup> and, of Fortune 500 Chief Executive Officers, only 23 are women – that's 4.6%<sup>10</sup>. The fact that the Equal Rights Amendment, which grants women equal rights in the United States Constitution, has never been passed exemplifies the need to open up dialogue about these issues with the next generation of leaders.

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

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

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

4 "Girl, Child, Human Rights, Childhood, Abuse, Violence, Health, Education, Child Marriage," UN News Center. UN, n.d. Web. 20 Jan. 2015.

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

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

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

8 "Women's Health." WHO.int. World Health Organization, Sept. 2013. Web. 09 Feb. 2015.

9 "Female World Leaders Currently in Power." Female World Leaders Currently in Power. N.p., 22 Jan. 2015. Web. 19 Feb. 2015.

10 "Women CEOs of S&P 500." Knowledge Center. Catalyst Inc., 13 Jan. 2015. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide contains a total of six lesson plans for English and Language Arts using a model of comparative literature. For each of the girls' stories featured in the I Am A Girl documentary film, teachers will find one corresponding lesson plan in this guide covering the following topics:

### JOURNALISM POETRY AND MUSIC STORYTELLING AND FOLKLORE

### PERSONAL ESSAY HUMANITARIAN REPORTS BLOGGING

Teachers can access the six video vignettes corresponding to the six girls' stories (12 minutes each) and full documentary (88 minutes total), under the EDUCATION tab at <http://www.iamagirl.com.au>. It is also possible to bring the film to your local cinema through the Gathr platform: <http://www.iamagirl.com.au/screenings-us/>.

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

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

Teachers should also note that these lesson plans do not represent a comprehensive approach of all the topics covered in the film, such as girls' access to education, sexual abuse, sex trafficking, reproductive health, and mental health. These lesson plans are designed to be interactive, student driven, and a tool to spark conversation. They may not entirely replace other lesson plans but should be seen as supplemental to get students talking about the topics while simultaneously improving skills on comparing texts, identifying writing techniques, and developing personal writing. It is up to the individual teacher to adapt these lessons to the reality of their classroom, to provide supplementary information and services, and to remind students of the available school psychological services in case these lessons trigger a strong emotional response.

As an additional resource to the following lesson plans, teachers may consider providing students with the following graphic organizer.

THE 5 W'S AND H (OF JOURNALISM)	I AM A GIRL STORY ANALYSIS
<b>WHO?</b> What are the names of the six young women featured in the film?	
<b>WHERE?</b> Where does each story take place?	
<b>WHEN?</b> When did each story take place? (What was the relevant political or social climate at that time?)	
<b>WHAT?</b> What human rights issue(s) are brought up in each girl's story? What prevents each girl from rising above her circumstances?	
<b>WHY?</b> Why should we be concerned about each of the issues explored in the film? What are each girl's hopes and dreams?	
<b>HOW?</b> How is each girl dealing with her situation? How does "place" affect each girls' situation?	

## EVALUATION

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

Teachers are encouraged to:

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

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

## LESSON 1:

Aziza



**SUBJECT: READING**

**THEME: COMPARATIVE LITERATURE / SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

### LESSON PLAN

**OBJECTIVE:** To compare the information and impact communicated by different media on the subject of girls' education.

**LESSON PLAN BY:** Blanca Vivancos/Emilie Clark  
**POPULATION:** High School Students (grades 9-12)  
**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will compare a video documentary piece with an article on a similar topic.
- Students will engage in a reflection process using guiding questions.
- Students will write a news article.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Sticky notes (a few per student)
- Pens
- Paper
- Printed copies of a news article (suggested article: <http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/26/world/asia/cnnheroes-afghan-schoolgirls/>)
- A video projector or other device to watch the film

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

During the video, the students should write down key pieces of information and note key parts of the story.

### SUGGESTED ARTICLE (10 MINUTES)

**Despite Deadly Risks, Afghan Girls Take Brave First Step**

By Allie Torgan, CNN

Wed September 26, 2012

<http://www.cnn.com/2012/09/26/world/asia/cnnheroes-afghan-schoolgirls/>

While reading the article above, students should go through and highlight key pieces of information.

### RESPONDING TO THE MATERIAL (10 MINUTES)

Looking back through their notes from the movie and the highlighted parts of the article, the students should use sticky notes to write down two important pieces of information that stuck out to them from the film and two pieces of information that stuck out to them from the article (4 sticky notes total).

The teacher will prompt the students to put their sticky notes on one designated wall for the film and on an adjacent wall for the article. The students should spend a few moments reading each other's pieces of information on each wall.

### REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (10 MINUTES)

- What differences/similarities do you observe on the walls?
- What elements make the information from the film stick out? What about the article?
- How do you think different media can serve different purposes?
- In what ways do different forms of media complement each other?

### SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP PROMPT

Use Aziza's story to write a news article.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

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

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

#### **PURDUE OWL: Journalism and Journalistic Writing**

Tips for Writing a Lead (most important element of a news story)

**1. The Five W's and H:** *Before writing a lead, decide which aspect of the story – who, what, when, where, why, how – is most important. You should emphasize those aspects in your lead. Wait to explain less important aspects until the second or third sentence.*

**2. Conflict:** *Good stories have conflict. So do many good leads.*

**3. Specificity:** *Though you are essentially summarizing information in most leads, try to be specific as possible. If your lead is too broad, it won't be informative or interesting.*

**4. Brevity:** *Readers want to know why the story matters to them and they won't wait long for the answer. Leads are often one sentence, sometimes two. Generally, they are 25 to 30 words and should rarely be more than 40. This is somewhat arbitrary, but it's important – especially for young journalists – to learn how to deliver information concisely. See the OWL's page on concise writing for specific tips. The Paramedic Method is also good for writing concisely.*

**5. Active sentences:** *Strong verbs will make your lead lively and interesting. Passive constructions, on the other hand, can sound dull and leave out important information, such as the person or thing that caused the action. Incomplete reporting is often a source of passive leads.*

**6. Audience and context:** *Take into account what your reader already knows. Remember that in today's media culture, most readers become aware of breaking news as it happens. If you're writing for a print publication the next day, your lead should do more than merely regurgitate yesterday's news.*

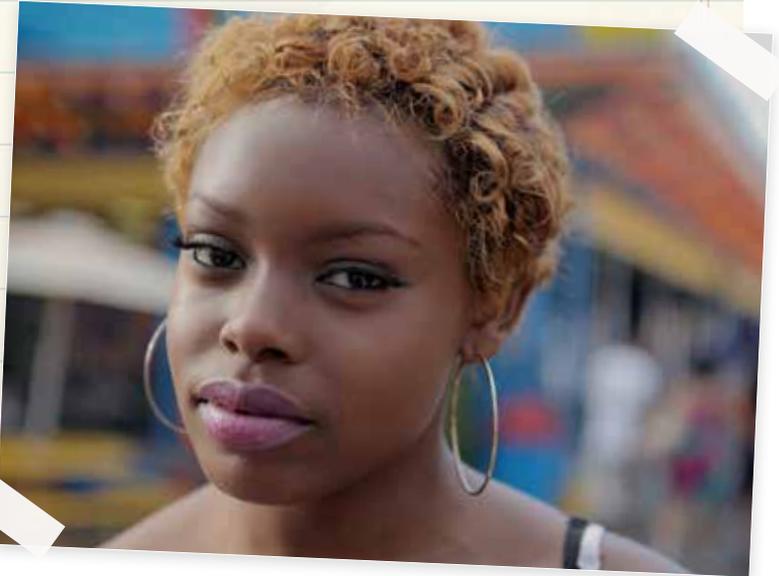
**7. Honesty:** *A lead is an implicit promise to your readers. You must be able to deliver what you promise in your lead.*

Read More here:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/735/05/>

## LESSON 2:

# Breana



**SUBJECT: READING/WRITING**  
**THEME: RAP AS A MEDIUM OF EXPRESSION AND ADVOCACY**

### LESSON PLAN

**OBJECTIVE:** To examine two entertainment mediums (rap/hip hop music and film) as sources of information and compare those two mediums.

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

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

**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will look at a rap written by someone their own age and examine it as a source of advocacy and personal narrative.
- Students will view and analyze a video connected to the topic.
- Students will engage in a reflection process using guiding questions.
- Students will be prompted to work on a creative writing piece.
- Students will reflect on the things they advocate for.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Printed rap for each student (see below)
- Different colored highlighters or pens for each student
- A video projector or other device to watch the film

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

### GIRL BE HEARD (10 MINUTES)

(Play the music to this rap while the students have the printed lyrics in front of them.) The song can be found on iTunes and proceeds for purchasing the music will go to supporting Breani's dream to become the Princess of Pop-Rap.

#### Girl Be Heard By Breani Michele

© BreaniMichele2015

*I feel you girl, I can feel your pain.  
You ain't the only one with issues, don't be ashamed.  
A different girl is getting raped every day.  
There are a lot of men with daughters they don't claim.  
Listen, I'm a girl just like you:  
have some moments that I think I won't get through.  
Sometimes I'm insecure, I don't know what to do.  
I fight the devil so the negative won't get through.  
I talk for a reason.  
I want to make a change, speaking for what I believe in.  
Empower the girl that's getting bullied,  
confront the ones doing the teasing.*

*What about the girl who cried herself to sleep?  
Single mom, no food to eat.  
What about the girl who joined the gang to survive?  
She finally felt safe and could sleep at night.  
What about the lonely rich girl,  
material world?*

*No genuine family or friends.  
Everyone around her acts pretend,  
so she takes a couple pills so her life could end.  
Is this how they want our youth?  
Society blind eyes, they don't see the truth.  
They say they're helping these girls,  
but they show no proof.  
GBH girls, that's my crew.  
We might teach you a lesson or two.  
'Cause every girl goes through her obstacles.  
Every girl is a strong soldier.  
So stand up and salute.*

*Chorus  
Don't let nobody tell you that you can't do that.  
Don't let nobody tell you that you can't do this.*

*You want to make a change then take the risk.*

### **RESPONDING TO THE MATERIAL (10 MINUTES)**

The teacher will ask the students to use two different colored highlighters or pens to “code the rap.” It will be helpful if all of the students are using the same two colors. The teacher will ask the students to go through the rap again using the first color to mark places where they see Breani’s personal voice and experience, and the second color to indicate where they see her response to social justice issues that she sees in the world (this is also called human rights advocacy). The students will share their findings.

### **REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (10 MINUTES)**

- How does Breani use art to advocate for important social justice issues?
- What are the specific issues that she raises awareness about?
- Who are other rappers you know?
- Which female rappers do you know?
- How do they use this medium of expression?
- What is the role of women/girls in the rap industry?
- What issues do you care about most? How can you use your talent to advocate for human rights issues?

### **SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP PROMPT**

Write a rap about the issues that are important to you, and how they connect to you and your life.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Teachers could take advantage of this opportunity to explore the history of rap as an activist art form. When rap first became a phenomenon it was all about activism; it was an outlet for black voices that weren't being heard elsewhere, where they could talk about the things that were going on in their lives, in their neighborhoods, and speak out for change.

**Hip Hop Caucus:** This is a project that encourages young people to be active in elections, policymaking, and service projects on the social issues that directly impact their lives and communities.

<http://www.hiphopcaucus.org/company/>

### **When Black Feminism Faces the Music and the Music is Rap**

Article from the New York Times.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/29/arts/pop-view-when-black-feminism-faces-the-music-and-the-music-is-rap.html>

**Creating Rap – 7 Tips:** Power Poetry, a great online resource for poetry writers and activists, has a tip sheet on writing rap. This is a simple guide that can take teachers and students through the steps of creating rap (i.e., the brainstorming process, creating the hook, the lyrics, etc.).

<http://www.powerpoetry.org/actions/7-tips-writing-rap>

**Female Rappers:** Teachers may want to expose students to rappers/hip hop artists who use their art as activism and encourage them to research further. Here are a couple of examples:

### **Queen Latifah: U.N.I.T.Y**

*Instinct leads me to another flow  
Everytime I hear a brother call a girl a bitch or a ho  
Trying to make a sister feel low  
You know all of that gots to go*

### **Black Eyed Peas: Where is the Love**

*But if you only have love for your own race  
Then you only leave space to discriminate  
And to discriminate only generates hate  
And when you hate then you're bound to get irate, yeah*

LESSON 3:

# Habiba



**SUBJECT: READING/SPEAKING AND LISTENING**  
**THEME: STORYTELLING AND FOLKLORE**

## LESSON PLAN

**OBJECTIVE:** To discover how the oral tradition of storytelling is a medium for sharing information and creating culture.

**LESSON PLAN BY:** Blanca Vivancos/Emilie Clark  
**POPULATION:** High School students (grades 9-12)  
**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will explore the genres of folklore and storytelling.
- Students will relate a story.
- Students will view and analyze a video connected to the topic.
- Students will engage in a reflection process using guiding questions.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Printed copies of the story “Girls Who Refused Their Suitors” for the class
- A video projector or other device to watch the film

## SUGGESTED READING (5 MINUTES)

**Girls Who Refused Their Suitors (Cameroon)**

There are three small vignettes about girls in Cameroon in this story. The allotted time (5 minutes) may only allow for students to read one of them.

<http://tinyurl.com/mmwpcy4>

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

### RESPONDING TO THE MATERIAL (10 MINUTES)

The teacher can lead the students in a discussion of the key aspects of a fable or oral story, explaining that typically a narrative arc looks something like a pyramid made up of the following components: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.

**Exposition:** Introduction of the story (characters, setting)

**Rising Action:** A series of events creating suspense or tension

**Climax:** The point of greatest tension, the turning point (top of the pyramid)

**Falling Action:** After the climax, the decrease of tension leading toward the resolution

**Resolution:** The solution or end to a particular conflict/problem presented in the story

After this discussion, the class will tell the story of Habiba in the form of an oral tale. The teacher will have one student come to the front of the room (or stand up, if the students are in a circle) and begin the tale “Once upon a time...” The teacher can ask the student to stop at any moment and pass the tale to another student who will take the story from where the first student left off. This continues until the story is complete.

### REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (10 MINUTES)

- What do you think could be some of the reasons why oral tradition in Africa has been so important?
- How do you think technology could play a role in the evolution of storytelling?
- What is your personal connection to storytelling?

### SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP PROMPT

Consider your own personal story (or an aspect of it) in terms of a moralistic tale like the ones read in class. Write your story using a similar structure.

### ADDITIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

**International Storytelling Conference:** In these two videos, renowned storytellers, Diane Ferlatte and Jan Blake, tell a series of stories while speaking of the importance of oral traditions.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iduMoffZ\\_54](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iduMoffZ_54)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELV8tq7pmBY>

LESSON 4:

Katie



SUBJECT: READING/WRITING  
THEME: PERSONAL ESSAY

LESSON PLAN

**OBJECTIVE:** To compare and contrast personal narrative and interview as story telling devices.

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

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

**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will compare first-person narrative style to interview style in telling personal stories.
- Students will view and analyze a video connected to the topic.
- Students will engage in a reflection process using guiding questions.
- Students will examine creative writing tools used in conveying personal narrative.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Printed copies of the following personal essay (see below) for the class
- A video projector or other device to watch the film

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

## CREATIVE PERSONAL ESSAY (15 MINUTES)

### Self Harm Survival by Halle Paredes

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

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

When I was finally able to go to school, I was different. I was extremely sensitive. I was always feeling tired or sick, and I just didn't feel like myself. One night in April, I couldn't sleep. I couldn't stop my insecurities from swirling around like a tornado in my head. I felt so overwhelmed with self-hate and sadness, I took it out on myself.

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

Over the course of a week, I broke my promise and cut myself several more times. Far off in my mind, I knew it was a problem, but I didn't want to face it. I decided I should tell a friend. I hoped she might tell an adult because I wasn't strong enough to. The only thing she told me to do was to stop. My habit worsened. I graduated from using household objects to using razors, which scared me. I couldn't stop. I was cutting more and more: 6-7 times a day. No matter where I was, I couldn't stop thinking about the next time I could cut myself. As I continued cutting, suicidal thoughts began to appear. As much as I had wanted to keep my cutting a secret, I needed to tell someone before it got worse. I needed to be my own hero.

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

This was the beginning of my recovery. I was sent to the hospital and learned – for the first time — that I am not alone. I learned that 1:12 teenagers are just like me, struggling with self-harm. I wish I could say relapse is not in my story. I was in and out of hospitals before I joined Girl Be Heard. Girl Be Heard has changed my life forever. Today, I can use my story at Girl Be Heard to help others to stop self-harm. I've made lifelong friends and learned my true potential as an artist, songwriter, singer and most importantly, as a person. I will be forever thankful for Girl Be Heard

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

©HalleParades

## RESPONDING TO THE MATERIAL (10 MINUTES)

The teacher will ask students to identify areas in Halle's piece where she uses the following figurative language and writing tools (imagery, metaphor, simile, etc.), as well as areas where these are used in the film.

Teachers can also ask students to reflect on each type of figurative language/creative tool and its effect on the readers. Teachers can use a graphic organizer to assist students in this. Here is an example:

	PERSONAL NARRATIVE	INTERVIEW
Imagery		
Metaphor		
Simile		
Storyline		
Voice		
What are the advantages of storytelling in this form?		
What are the disadvantages of storytelling in this form?		

If time allows, teachers can ask students to transfer this chart into a Venn diagram for further comparison.

## REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (5 MINUTES)

- How are these two pieces of information similar or different?
- What advantages/disadvantages do each of these mediums have?
- In what ways are each of these mediums useful in sharing a personal story? What elements can you identify to support your answer?

## SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP PROMPT

Tell the story of overcoming a personal obstacle. It can be large or small, but use imagery, metaphor, and storyline (plot) to communicate your story. Your story should have a beginning, middle and end.

## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

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

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

*The statistics are staggering, 1 in 5 young people suffer from a mental illness; that's 20 percent of our population but yet only about 4 percent of the total health care budget is spent on our mental health.*

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

### **Poetry Tools and Elements**

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/resources>

This website has articles and essays on elements of poetry and storytelling like imagery, voice, and metaphor, as well as links to other sites with even more information that could be useful to instructors.

LESSON 5:

Kimsey



**SUBJECT: READING/SPEAKING AND LISTENING**  
**THEME: HUMANITARIAN REPORTS**

**LESSON PLAN**

**OBJECTIVE:** To compare and contrast coverage of an issue by two different mediums: documentary film and humanitarian reports.

**LESSON PLAN BY:** Blanca Vivancos/Emilie Clark  
**POPULATION:** High School students (grades 9-12)  
**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will explore safety and physical health concerns to sex trafficking.
- Students will view and analyze a video connected to the topic.
- Students will compare the use of personal story with factual data on engaging audiences on an issue.
- Students will engage in a reflection process using guiding questions.
- Students will evaluate the issue by matching data with narrative.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Print outs of the WHO report for the entire class (see below)
- A video projector or other device to watch the film
- For this lesson plan, it may be helpful for the teacher to provide students with a “note catcher” that they can use when viewing the video and reading the article. See example below.

Mark the source (film or WHO report)	Mark down details, images, or quotations that stand out to you.	Is this subjective or objective? How do you know?	On a Scale from 1-10 (1=not at all) how much does this make you want to do something about the issue?

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

## REPORT ON SAFETY AND HEALTH OF TRAFFICKED INDIVIDUALS (10 MINUTES)

The class will read through the United Nations Report on Human Trafficking and HIV/AIDS.  
<http://www.ungift.org/knowledgehub/en/about/human-trafficking-and-hiv-aids.html>

## RESPONDING TO THE MATERIAL (10 MINUTES)

The teacher will split up the class into two groups: one will be the film group, and the other will be the UN report group. The teacher will give each group three minutes to discuss what they learned from their particular information source, and how they felt after having watched or read it.

Next, each team will have the opportunity to convince the teacher of the horrors of sex trafficking using only the information that they gained from their source.

## REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (10 MINUTES)

- Which of these two types of information (factual versus personal) do you feel more connected to? Why do you think that is?
- Which is more convincing? Why or how?
- If you were to depend on one of these to understand a given situation, which one would you use and why?
- What are the uses or audiences for each?
- Is there a way to synthesize both types of media for more impact? In what circumstances would that be beneficial?

## SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP PROMPT

If you were to make a video on this issue, how would you combine the data from the two sources we used in class? Write down the outline of the script for your video.

## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

**The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women:** CATW is an international non-governmental organization working to end sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of women and children worldwide. The site contains many great resources for teachers or students including information on sex trafficking, best practices for ending the demand of sexual exploitation, and more.

Visit the website: <http://www.catwinternational.org>

LESSON 6:

Manu



SUBJECT: READING/WRITING  
THEME: BLOGGING

LESSON PLAN

**OBJECTIVE:** To assess the importance of new media in shaping identities.

**LESSON PLAN BY:** Blanca Vivancos/Emilie Clark  
**POPULATION:** High School students (grades 9-12)  
**TIME ALLOCATED:** 40-45 minutes

**OUTCOMES:**

- Students will analyze the importance and impact of new media in sharing information through a blog and a video.
- Students will engage in a reflection process using guiding questions.

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- A video projector or other device to watch the film
- Computer with access to the internet to read the blog
- For this lesson plan, it may be helpful for the teacher to provide students with a “note catcher” that they can use when viewing the video and reading the article. See example below.

Information Searched	Student Response

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

## CHECKING THE BLOG (10 MINUTES)

The following link is to Papua New Guinea's most famous blog and winner of the UNESCO/Divine Word University Award for Communications and Development. In it, students will find current events, arts, entertainment, sports, and culture posts about the country that Manu is from.

Students should use this link for the following activity: <http://malumnalu.blogspot.com>

Whether individually or in groups, students should have the opportunity to search through the blog and find relevant information related to the film. They can use the search bar to find topics related to reproductive health and childbirth, or simply to find out more about the country that Manu is from. The teacher can encourage students to think about the advantages and disadvantages of the blogosphere as an informative resource.

To help the students in this search process, the teacher can provide a note catcher, such as the one below.

Information Searched	Student Response

## RESPONDING TO THE MATERIAL (10 MINUTES)

The teacher can guide students through the process of making their own blog: students would actually open an account on BlogSpot or Wordpress or any other platform of their choice and start creating their personal blogs.

## REFLECTION: GUIDING QUESTIONS (15 MINUTES)

- What are the advantages of the blogosphere? What are the risks?
- What kind of information is usually shared through blogs? Why do you think this is so?
- In your case, what kind of blog are you creating and why?

## SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP PROMPT

Students will write their first post on their blogs.

## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

**Why Blog:** The following article explores reasons why students would benefit from blogging.  
<http://gettingsmart.com/2012/10/10-reasons-why-i-want-my-students-blog/>

**BlogBasics:** General overview, definitions, steps, and tools for blogging.  
<http://blogbasics.com>



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

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

For DVD enquiries please visit Women Make Movies

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



**Created by:** Blanca Vivancos, Lead Teaching Artist  
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Abigail Ramsay, Director of Global Partnerships  
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**Special thanks to:** Vicki Mooney, Native American Playwright, The Eagle Project  
Jenny Navasky, Counselor, Humanities Preparatory Academy  
Taina Bien-Aime, Executive Director, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women

Breani's music is available on iTunes.

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

**G!R!L  
BE HEARD**

*i am a girl*

@GirlBeHeard2014

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

## **ADDENDUM**



# REAL GIRLS REAL STORIES

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



# G!RL BE HEARD

# G!RL BE HEARD

## MISSION:

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



## OUR PHILOSOPHY

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



## WHY DO WE DO THIS WORK?

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

## RAVE REVIEWS

*"Fearless, political theatre."*

– **Huffington Post**

*"Can't miss production."*

– **Ebony Magazine**

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

– **The New Yorker**

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

– **Gloria Steinem**

## EDUCATION SERVICES

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

 Girl Be Heard

 @GirlBeHeard



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

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

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

# G!RL BE HEARD

## GIRL BE HEARD ORIGINAL SHOWS

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

# G!RL BE HEARD

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



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

## **Performances**

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

## **Workshops**

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

## **Cross-Cultural Exchange**

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

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

## Family Owned and Operated

By Betsy Perez, Age 23



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

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

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

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

**@BetsyPerez2014**



## Look At Me

by Breani Michele, Age 18

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

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

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

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

**@BreaniMichele2014**

## Chatty Belly

Allysia Potter, age 20

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

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

Hah, oh yeah, my belly cannot lie.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**@AllysiaPotter2014**





## Halle's Story

Halle Paredes, age 15

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**@HalleParedes2014**



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You do it like this.

**@MelanieThompson2014**

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

**PSA:**

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

**Girl Be Heard Sizzle Reel:**

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

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

**Special Performances:**

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

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

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

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

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