

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

No Easy Answers

(Ed.) Donald R. Gallo

written by Ashlin Bray

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Note To Teacher

This book contains contemporary short stories dealing with decision-making by teenagers. Themes include responsibility, peer pressure, sexuality (both heterosexuality and homosexuality), pregnancy, drug use, physical violence, homicide, mental cruelty, moral choices, and the legal system. Some explicit language is included.

Notes on the editor, Donald R. Gallo:

Donald R. Gallo specializes in literature for young adults and received the 1992 ALAN Award for his work. *No Easy Answers* is his seventh compilation of stories for Bantam Doubleday Dell. All 16 stories in the book were commissioned for their thematic content. He has also written a book (with Sarah K. Herz) called *Building Bridges Between Young Adult Literature and the Classics*.

In the Introduction to *No Easy Answers*, Mr. Gallo emphasizes that the themes included in the stories have been selected to illustrate the difficulty of making moral choices in today's world. He visualizes the stories as vehicles for discussion and reflection.

All references come from *No Easy Answers*, Edited by Donald R. Gallo, Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers, 1997.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the students should be able to:

1. discuss the use of clichés as a device of personification, using “The Photograph” as a reference.
2. evaluate a series of options facing fictional characters and make informed judgments about the choices made in the stories.
3. comment on the construction of a story, using “Cradle Hold” as an example of how a title, a story’s opening, and a climactic scene hold the story together.
4. cite examples of the use of inference in writing, referring to “Stranger” and “Wishing It Away.”
5. pull examples from several stories to address universal themes including responsibility, guilt, and peer pressure.
6. use the actions of fictional characters to explain the reader’s own actions in certain circumstances.
7. evaluate the behavior of adults, citing examples from “The Photograph,” “I’ve Got Gloria,” “Cradle Hold,” “Wishing It Away,” and “Trashback.”
8. identify irony as a literary device in “Confession,” “Trashback,” and “The Doi Store Monkey.”
9. discuss ethnicity as it is presented in these stories and evaluate whether ethnicity is an issue in the decisions made by the characters.
10. act as a literary critic, analyzing the strengths of one story and the weaknesses of another.
11. discuss the difference between a protagonist and a hero, citing examples from the stories.
12. articulate a moral hierarchy, discussing slight lapses of judgment among the characters in the stories, serious errors, and morally reprehensible acts.

Questions For Essay and Discussion

How Did I Get Myself Into This?

1. In “The Photograph,” discuss Anthony’s size and interests, and evaluate how they set him up to “get into this.”
2. “The Photograph” includes sexism, homophobia, betrayal, and redemption. Give an example of each.
3. In “Bliss at the Burger Bar,” what does the incident with Old Faithful (when he tries to buy fries) reveal about Bliss and her management style?
4. When Bliss leaves Hannah at home, she wonders if she could have done more. What other choices would she have had?
5. In “The Photograph,” Anthony has two points when he had a moral choice to make. In “Bliss at the Burger Bar,” Bliss had one major choice regarding Hannah. In “Moon over Missouri,” Mike made a big decision regarding the contract. Compare their decisions.
6. In the story “The Photograph,” the author completes the story, but in “Bliss at the Burger Bar,” the author leaves Hannah’s story unfinished. Discuss why you think the authors would approach their subjects so differently.
7. Both “The Photograph” and “Bliss at the Burger Bar” revolve around sexual relationships, although these relationships are not directly part of the stories. Discuss the ways in which the stories’ characters make themselves vulnerable because of their sexual relationships.
8. Discuss the differences between legal responsibility and moral responsibility in “Moon over Missouri,” considering Mike’s situation as the signer of the contract, his decision concerning royalties, and the role of the Flaky Four in defending the lawsuit.
9. “Moon over Missouri” is Mike’s story. Evaluate the role Mike’s father played in the story and his responsibilities to the Flaky Four and to his son.
10. “How Did I Get Myself Into This?” is a question that confronts everyone from time to time. Discuss the leadership styles of Lance, Milo, Bliss, and Mike, and tie them back to the title of this section, pointing out the effects of different leadership styles on peers and on decision-making.

General questions

26. Discuss how feelings of powerlessness can lead to poor decisions, as illustrated in the following stories:
- “Confession”
 - “Stranger”
 - “The Doi Store Monkey”
27. Discuss the importance of peer pressure in making both poor and good decisions. Cite examples from any three stories listed below:
- “X-15s”
 - “Duet”
 - “The Photograph”
 - “Eva and the Mayor”
 - “Confession”
 - “Simon Says”
 - “Trashback”
28. Suppose that you are a family therapist. How would you counsel Cory Willhouse, Little Li, and Johnny Smythe, three clients who are dealing with guilt?

No Easy Answers

Introduction

VOCABULARY

character – the level of integrity or morality displayed by a person
ethically – relating to making moral choices
illiterate – unable to read
moral – a sense of right and wrong
retaliation – getting even with someone

1. Does the editor believe that teenagers have moral standards?

2. What does the editor state as the goal of this book?

3. Are all the characters in the stories to be considered good role models?

IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME

I've Got Gloria

BY M. E. KERR

1. When the story opens, what is Scott setting up?

2. What do Scott and his father discuss on the way to have the car serviced?

3. What action does Scott take after thinking over his conversation with his father?

4. What jolt does Scott receive?

5. What message did Mrs. Whitman leave for Scott?

Stranger
BY WALTER DEAN MYERS

VOCABULARY

Big C – cancer
freebased – made a refined and very powerful form of cocaine
G.E.D. – General Education Diploma (a certificate issued to someone who has completed basic educational requirements but has not graduated from high school)
skips – pieces of cardboard or other material to protect or replace shoes

1. How does the author introduce the subject of Cassie’s addiction?

2. What does the man in the park mean when he asks Cassie if she is “in the life”?

3. Who is the stranger that Cassie sees in her apartment?
