

# L.A. youth teacher's guide

*Publishing Schedule*

**L.A. Youth will begin arriving Wed., Nov. 18**

## Key to using the November-December 2009 issue:

ARTICLE and PAGE NUMBER	KEY TEACHING POINTS
<p><b>I swear not to swear</b> p. 5 Hannah is trying not to cuss but admits it's hard.</p>	<p>See lesson plan on page 2.</p>
<p><b>Hit with the real cost of college</b> pp. 6-7 Amanda wanted to go out of state, but when she couldn't get the loans she needed, she ended up at a community college.</p>	<p>Have you talked to your parents about how much your family can afford to spend on college? Does a good education have to cost a lot of money?</p>
<p><b>Jeans are always in style</b> pp. 8-9 Jasper loves jeans and wears them all the time.</p>	<p>What's your favorite thing to wear and why? What do you think that says about you?</p>
<p><b>COVER STORY: My American dream</b> pp. 10-11 As an undocumented immigrant, a girl thought college was out of reach—but she found a way.</p>	<p>Should undocumented students be eligible for financial aid? What do you think of the DREAM Act?</p>
<p><b>Learning to live with ADHD</b> pp. 12-13 Once Elis was diagnosed, she got help that made it easier to focus in school.</p>	<p>How have you struggled in school? What strategies helped you do better?</p>
<p><b>Thinking about race</b> p. 16 L.A. Youth staff writers say a museum exhibit challenged their views about race and stereotypes.</p>	<p>What does race mean to you? How do you identify yourself?</p>
<p><b>Blinded by stereotypes</b> p. 17 Charlene says that when we make assumptions about people, we don't see who they really are.</p>	<p>Have you ever been judged or stereotyped because of your race? How did it make you feel? Have you ever judged others?</p>
<p><b>A family away from home</b> p. 19 Sally says the girls in her group home have been there for her like sisters.</p>	<p>Who do you turn to for support? How can friends help you when family can't?</p>
<p><b>My mom is all I need</b> pp. 20-21 Even though Jessica's dad is not around, she believes in herself because of her mom's love and support.</p>	<p>Do people judge you based on your family? How does your family influence who you are?</p>
<p><b>My family can't afford to get sick</b> pp. 22-23 Serli worries about her family because they don't have health insurance.</p>	<p>How important is it for people to have health insurance? Do you think the government should help make it affordable?</p>

# How does our word choice affect people's perceptions of us

A lesson plan based on “I swear not to swear” from the November-December 2009 issue of L.A. Youth. In this article, Hannah writes about how she used to be the most foul-mouthed of her friends, but is now trying to clean up her act.

By Mike Fricano, co-managing editor

Grades: 7-12

Subjects: Language Arts, Life Skills

Suggested Time Allowance: 45 minutes-1 hour

## Overview:

Students will examine how the words they use affect others' perceptions of them.

## Resources/Materials:

- copies of the L.A. Youth article “I swear not to swear” (one per student)
- pens/pencils and paper
- whiteboard or black board

## Introduction:

Many teachers, administrators and adults say that they're aghast at how much more often students swear in public (compared to when they were younger), the severity of the curse words and that these words are appearing at younger ages.

“The kids swear almost incessantly,” said English teacher Dan Horwich, in an article that appeared in the Washington Post. “They are so used to swearing and hearing it at home, and in the movies, and on TV, and in the music they listen to that they have become desensitized to it.”

According to a Parents Television Council report published in October 2008, nearly 11,000 expletives (h\*ll, d\*\*k, a\*\*, p\*ss, scr\*w, b\*\*\*\*, b\*\*\*\*\*d, suck, cr\*p, s\*\*\* and f\*\*\*) were aired during prime-time on broadcast TV in 2007, which is nearly twice as many as in 1998.

## Warm-up discussion:

Ask your students about how they feel when they hear a friend swear and write their answers on the board in a single column. They might say: “I barely notice,” “It's no big deal,” “I usually say it first,” “It really bothers me,” “I don't care, but I don't swear,” “It always make their stories/jokes funnier” or “It's OK because they were really angry.”

Next, ask your students how they feel when they hear a teacher, their parents/guardians or a respected adult, like a church leader, use profanity. Write these answers on the board in a separate column next to the first. Responses could include: “It surprises me,” “It scares me,” “It's not right,” “It sounds unprofessional,” “It makes them seem cool and/or relatable,” “I'm disappointed” or “That's who I learned it from.”

Now compare the two columns and ask your students, “Why are the answers different?” We have different expectations of how different people should speak, but why?

## Activities:

Have students read Hannah's story “I swear not to swear” on page 5. As a discussion measuring their reading comprehension, ask students to answer the following questions about the story:

What are some reasons Hannah used profanity?

- It was rebellious when she and her friends started doing it in middle school.
- Having her friends introduce her as “the potty mouth” was something she was proud of.
- It was easier to use swear words to spice up her conversations.
- It can make a person seem intimidating.

What made Hannah go from being proud of having the dirtiest mouth to

wanting to stop swearing?

- People and publications she respects, like President Barack Obama and The New York Times, don't use profanity, like the f-word.
- She was bothered when someone she just met pointed out that she swore a lot.
- It really bothered her when she heard her 13- and 11-year-old younger brothers swear.
- She started to see swearing as a sign of immaturity.

## Discussion:

After reading the story, ask your students what they think of Hannah's use of profanity? What do they think of her reasons for wanting to stop cussing? Do they admire her decision or do they think she shouldn't worry about it? After reading her story, have their opinions of profanity changed?

But who's to say all swearing is necessarily bad? Classics taught in schools like Huckleberry Finn, Fahrenheit 451 and The Catcher in the Rye all have some. Do the students think that it's appropriate or defensible in some circumstances?

## Assignment:

Have students write an essay explaining their views on the use of profanity. Is it ever acceptable or perhaps even preferred? If so, when and for whom, and more importantly, why? Their essays should draw on points raised during the discussion and Hannah's story.

## Extension activity:

If they're feeling inspired, how would they try to cut back or eliminate their own use of profanity? Have students devise a plan to cut back on their swearing, perhaps by enlisting a friend to remind them, like Hannah did. And then have them keep a journal of how often they swear to see if they are able to cut back.



## Would you like a speaker from L.A. Youth?

Editors Laura Lee and Mike Fricano speak about journalism, current events, working as a reporter, how to be a better writer and how students can get involved in L.A. Youth.

Call Laura or Mike at (323) 938-9194 or e-mail [llee@layouth.com](mailto:llee@layouth.com) or [mfricano@layouth.com](mailto:mfricano@layouth.com). PLEASE NOTE: You'll be asked to pay \$5 to help offset the cost of gas.

**THANKS TO TEACHERS** who contributed letters to the editor and essays: Jolie Augustine, Wilson MS in Glendale; Elizabeth Montaña, Camino Nuevo Charter Academy; Jacqueline Hartt, East Valley HS in North Hollywood; K. Jackson, Birmingham Community Charter HS in Van Nuys; Jennifer and Chris Davis, Clark Magnet HS in La Crescenta; Ms. Moore, Washington Prep; and Macali Soto, Markham MS.

**Teens:**  
**Join the**  
**staff of**  
**L.A.**  
**Youth**  
*the newspaper*  
*written by and*  
*about teens*



**Next Newcomer's Orientation: Saturday, Dec. 12, 11 a.m.-noon** at  
 L.A. Youth 5967 W. Third Street Suite 301, L.A. 90036 (between Fairfax and La Brea)

Call Amanda, Laura or Mike at (323) 938-9194.