

Name \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

**Mark up the text: Question, Connect, Predict (Infer), Clarify (Paraphrase), and Evaluate (*at least one of each type of annotation*). Use the stem statements on p. 6 of the ELA Text Pack. Circle unfamiliar words, draw arrows to make connections within the text, use exclamation points & question marks in the margin, and label examples (EX)**

“The Compelling Power of Cliques”

Kids from preschool to high school are continuously motivated *and pressured* to fit in with their peers. Beginning as early as elementary school, many kids respond by forming and/or joining tight-knit groups of friends who share similar interests and values. During the teen years these group formations can be less casually and more rigidly formed, e.g., social "cliques," that individuals are accepted by—or excluded from.

As a ready-made group of friends, a clique can help its members form relationships and develop a feeling of belonging. By identifying with a set group of friends, the "clique" can help teens during the emotionally tumultuous years of adolescence—providing a safe haven of friends to socialize with, confide in, and feel supported by as they cope with the day-to-day issues of being a teen. To varying degrees, cliques can play a powerful role in shaping and reinforcing what the members wear and say, how they relate to other classmates, how they respond to their studies, how they relate to teachers and other figures of authority, how they interact with their family, what plans they make for after high school, and how they feel about themselves overall. The relationships that a teen forms with friends and cliques during the middle and high school years sets the stage for other intimate relationships as she or he grows; these relationships guide the teen when he or she is faced with tough choices to make about intimacy, drinking, drugs and other hazards.

Ideally, belonging to a set group of friends or "clique" can help a teen feel capable, cool, and in control. Sometimes, however, the power of social cliques can cast a dark shadow. When a teen becomes part of a clique that formally or informally enforces conforming to negative and even dangerous behavior, whether it's snubbing or harassing other kids who don't belong to the clique, skipping school, shoplifting, engaging in unsafe activities, or encouraging the use of alcohol and/or drugs, a member of a clique can become susceptible to caving into negative peer pressure rather than determining and making choices from his own sense of what's right and wrong.

Cliques don't always consist of the coolest kids in school. Kids who get shunned from the more popular cliques, or, for whatever reason, just don't fit in with their peers in general, sometimes form "fringe" cliques. Or, they may simply become loners. Feeling ostracized and misunderstood, these teens may be even more susceptible to developing rebellious and self-destructive behavior.

How can a teen become empowered so that they are, as much as possible, equipped to cope with potential negative peer pressure and confidence-eroding cliques throughout the middle and high school years? Each teen's life situation is uniquely different and there is no one-size-fits-all formula for how to make it through adolescence stronger and wiser than when you began. For every teen, however, developing a wide network of friends and overall support system is essential. Maintaining involvement with others *beyond* one's clique can provide important additional personal self-definition and balance. Maybe for you it's sports, or some aspect of the arts, or a community effort. Being at the "giving end" helps too—e.g., coaching a little kids' soccer team, being a camp counselor, teaching a class at the local Y or skate park, volunteering for an organization that's dedicated to an issue you're particularly passionate about.

The "network" of those you can turn to and feel supported by could include peers (in a clique or not), but should also include others outside the clique you trust and look up to. This might be an older sibling, your parent(s) or other family members. Or maybe it's a teacher(s), coach, a friend's parent(s), a community leader, or a professional counselor. Again, widening your personal "network" will increase your options and help you weather even the meanest cliques.

These suggestions might all sound simple or like a cliché; however, they come from older teenagers who really *do* understand the complexity and intense difficulty of being a teen and facing the everyday pressures of school. It's no secret how mean and hurtful cliques can be. This "simple" and very sincere advice will help you navigate the rough waters of teen-age years. It won't always be smooth sailing, but you at least have a chart, a compass, and a worthy destination.

**Questions.** Answer on a separate sheet of paper. Clearly label your answers. Make sure you have written the minimum number of sentences for each response.

1. Write a three-sentence summary of this article.
2. List the positives and negatives of being in a clique. (in a t-chart, 4 each)
3. What advice would you give a new 6<sup>th</sup> grader about coping with cliques in a middle school? (8 sentences)