EIGHTH GRADE

DISCUSSION GUIDE

✓ age 14+ ★★★★☆

This discussion guide for the film Eighth Grade was a collaboration between the film studio A24 and Common Sense Education. It provides educators and administrators with relevant conversation starters to help students explore the topics addressed in the film.

ABOUT THE FILM

Eighth Grade is an extremely realistic, relatable dramedy directed by YouTube star Bo Burnham about being a teenager. Elsie Fisher stars as Kayla, a social media-savvy teen who's dealing with the often-awkward transition between middle and high school. There's so much here to unpack, from mean-girl behavior and device/screen use to the meaning of consent. The movie also promotes open communication between teens and their parents, as well as courage, since Kayla learns to love and speak up for herself.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR TEENS (8th Grade and Up)

Role Models and Behavior

- What makes Eighth Grade feel realistic? How does it compare to other movies about teens in that way?

- How are Kayla and her struggles relatable? Did you have empathy for her? What sparked that? Is she brave? If so, how? Do you consider her a role model?

- Kayla was voted quietest in her class and felt she had to convince others she wasn't. Has there ever been a time when people saw you differently than you see yourself?

- Did you notice any bullying or "mean girl" behavior in the movie? How does the way it's shown here compare to other portrayals of bullying you've seen in movies or on TV? How did it affect Kayla? Have you ever wanted to do/say what she did/said in the end?

- Kayla finds herself in a very uncomfortable position with an older teen boy, Riley. How did watching that scene make you feel? Did her reaction give you any ideas for how to handle a similar situation? What does "consent" mean in this context?

- How does Gabe treat Kayla differently than Riley does? During their dinner, what does he do to make her feel comfortable?

- Kayla exaggerates her experience with boys/hooking up to impress a guy, and the characters talk about sharing nude photos and other mature topics. Did that feel true to life? Do you know anyone who's posted/shared that kind of thing? What happened?

Social Media, Devices, and Screen Time

- How are social media and screen time depicted in the movie? What are some good and bad aspects to social media? What moments in the film illustrate these aspects?

- What purpose does Kayla's YouTube channel play in her life? How does it help her/hold her back?

- In her videos, Kayla talks about "being yourself," but she also says she feels nervous all the time. Why do you think the way Kayla acts in real life vs. online are different?

- Have you experienced that?

- Is it sometimes easier to be yourself online? Why? Which version of yourself do you consider the "real" you?

- How does Kayla build confidence throughout the film? When it doesn't go well, how does she cope? Where do teens get confidence, and how does social media affect it?

- The high school students are shocked when they find out Kayla got Snapchat in fifth grade. Do you see those kinds of differences between you and students in other grades? What are they?

Communication and Relationships

- How would you describe the relationship between the Kayla and her dad? Did you find their relationship realistic or exaggerated for humor?

- How would you describe Kayla's dad's parenting style? How do you think adults can best help teens deal with middle and high school?

- Does the movie promote communication between teens and parents? How does device use affect that? Has your family ever tried a "device-free dinner" or setting other device limits? If not, would you?

- How do parents and teens in the film (and in real life) see the world differently? How does social media have an impact on these differences? How does social media improve relationships or make them more challenging?

Final Thoughts

- The movie was rated R for strong language. Do you think that's enough of a reason to stop teens from seeing a movie about characters their age? Does strong language make a movie more or less relatable to you?

- What challenges that you face did the film not address?

Additional Digital Citizenship and Media Literacy Tools

- Common Sense Media movie reviews: https://www.commonsensemedia.org/movie-reviews

- Common Sense Education Digital Citizenship curriculum: https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship

- Common Sense research report -- Social Media, Social Life: Teens Reveal Their Experiences: https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/social-media-social-life-2018