



Regents Practice #1

Using *New Youth Connections*

Use the following *New Youth Connections* story and practice lesson to help your students prepare for the New York State English Regents exam. (Not prepping for the Regents? This is a good story and the lesson will help your students become more careful readers or listeners.)

Stop Following Me

I'm young and black,—and I'm no shoplifter

By **Stephanie Hinkson**

"Excuse me, miss, do you need help?"

"No, thank you. I do not."

That's how it often starts. She asks me if I need help and pretends to fix something.

I move, she moves. I stop, she stops. I turn around, she watches. You should be getting the pattern by now.

I am in a store shopping. I am African-American and young, and I think it's because of my race and age that she, the store employee, thinks I'm going to steal.

Like a Red Laser Beam

What's funny is that the employees are of all races. Yes, the black and Hispanic ones are on my back also.

Most of the time, it takes them less

than two minutes after I walk into the store to get within a few feet of me. Their faulty radar turns their eyes laser-beam red and they fly over to me in no time, pretending to fix the shirts on the rack or the pants on the shelf behind me.

The point when it really hits me that they're watching me like a surveillance camera is when I'm focused on the clothes I'm about to buy and realize they haven't moved. If I'm looking at things for two minutes and you are still straightening the clothes next to me, there's definitely a problem.

I'm Not a Thief

This is when I get angry. This is 2005 and I feel like people still can't get past the color of my skin. Yes, I am young, I am black and I want to buy something from your store. I am not going to steal and I feel angry that anyone would suspect me of doing so.

I don't see myself as a target for suspicion. I'm quiet and I dress nicely. I usually wear high heels and dressy shirts. I don't like looking like everyone else my age. I believe impression is important and I carry myself maturely.

I wouldn't shoplift because my mother taught me better than that. I'm a Christian and I believe that stealing is wrong. Plus, it's a crime and I'd never do anything to

jeopardize my future.

So if someone assumes differently, I feel offended. They don't understand who I am.

'Is There a Problem?'

I first try to ignore the "red eye" so I can keep my cool and continue looking at the clothes. Sometimes she's still right behind me. That's when my question comes out.

"Is there a problem?" I ask the red eye.

"Problem? There is no problem," is the usual reply.

"Well, I think there is because you have been following me since I came into the store and I didn't ask for any help, so can you please excuse me?" I've said this more times than I can remember.

Sometimes they'll apologize and try to appear sorry. Other times they glare at me like they want to take it outside. Whenever that happens I let them know, "If there is a problem I can always go speak to your manager." That's when they back off.

Followed at Kings Plaza

One day I went shopping with my friend Tiffany, who's African-American also, at Kings Plaza mall in Brooklyn. We went into a shoe store, where there were other customers shopping. As we made

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our way up one aisle, there was the red eye.

We went down the aisle—so did the red eye. By the next aisle I knew what was going to happen.

“Tiffany, let’s leave, ’cause we are being followed,” I told my friend.

“Yeah, for real,” Tiffany replied.

We left the store, but that company has a clothing section in a different part of the mall, and after we stopped somewhere else, that’s where we went. Tell me, did we see the same red eye in the store?

When we saw her, Tiffany and I looked at each other and started laughing. She didn’t follow us in this store though. I think she’d heard us in the previous store and had gotten the gist of things.

I Know Some Teens Steal

Some people ask if being suspected of shoplifting is a race issue or an age issue for me, and I think it’s both. When I asked my mother and a couple of other adults of color if they feel like they get followed in stores, their answer was, “Hardly ever.” Yes, it might happen once or twice, but not the way it happens to me.

To be fair, it’s true that more teenagers are caught shoplifting than any other age group. And I know teens who steal.

Sometimes teenagers shoplift to impress their friends, or to fit in by doing whatever their friends are doing. Some teenagers steal because they have no money and they don’t want to be teased for not having the newest name-brand clothes. I’ve also seen people selling their shoplifted goods on the street to make money.

But I don’t think I’m followed just

because I’m young.

Claire’s Culprit Got Away

Another *New Youth Connections* writer, Anna Yakir, who’s white, said she’s seldom been followed in stores. And she told me about an incident she saw in a Claire’s Accessories store.

“I saw two female friends together,” Anna said. One was black and one was white. “As I was looking at them,” Anna said, “the white girl took something.”

One of the store clerks suspected something and walked up to the two of them, but approached the black girl, and the white girl walked out of the store. “The true culprit got off,” Anna said. The friends were both young, but the black girl got singled out most likely because of her race.

Anna’s story upset me but it didn’t surprise me. There have been many times when I’ve been in a store and white people weren’t followed but I was.

Suing Macy’s

And many adults of color report discrimination in stores, too. In a 2003 Gallup poll, almost a third of the black adults surveyed said that in the previous month, they’d been treated unfairly in a store because they were black.

I understand that shoplifting is a problem. Stores lose out when people steal. An annual survey of stores estimates that nationwide there are about a million shoplifting incidents every day, totaling a loss of around \$10 billion a year.

But store management’s acting as if only certain races steal doesn’t benefit them. In 2002, Sharon Simmons-Thomas,

an African-American secretary, sued Macy’s for racial profiling. She said that though innocent of shoplifting, she was detained and mistreated by Macy’s security personnel because of her race.

Macy’s paid to settle the case in 2004, so it didn’t go to trial. In January 2005, Macy’s settled another lawsuit over alleged racial profiling of black and Latino customers, brought by New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer. Macy’s had to pay \$600,000 in damages and change its security practices.

I’ll Take My Business Elsewhere

Teenagers who feel like they are obvious targets for the red eye don’t have to stand there and take it. I’ve been followed enough times that I’ve figured out how to deal with it.

Sometimes I ask to speak to the manager, which usually results in the employee trying to apologize and keep it hush-hush. Or I’ll decide not to spend my money in that particular store, and leave. If you follow me down like a scavenger to fresh meat then I do not need to spend my money in your store.

If you’re an honest person, you should not be made to feel like a criminal. And if you are a teenage shoplifter, you’re making it hard on the rest of us. Shoplifting is a crime and you can go to jail for it. Think twice before you take something.

Finally, to all of you red eyes, keep in mind the next time you see a young person of color in your store, all minorities do not steal, and neither do all teens. ☒

Practice Lesson for Regents Exam Reading Section

What the teacher needs to know: The Regents English exam has a reading section. One part of the test asks students to complete multiple choice questions based on two reading passages. (This lesson

uses only one passage.)

To Do: Have your group read the story. Then have them complete the questions on page 3.

Stop Following Me

Multiple Choice Questions

Directions: Use your notes to answer the questions about the story read to you.

1) What is one reason the writer doesn't give for why some teens might steal?

- a) to have trendy clothes
- b) to get a thrill
- c) to resell stolen goods
- d) to fit in with friends

2) The amount of money that stores say they lose annually because of shoplifting is

- a) \$15 billion
- b) over \$20 billion
- c) \$10 billion
- d) less than \$10 billion

3) What is the main reason the author thinks she is suspected of being a shoplifter?

- a) she is a teenager
- b) she is black
- c) she shops in Macy's
- d) she spends a lot of time shopping

4) What does the author sometimes do when she thinks she is being observed too closely?

- a) she tells the sales person she won't shop there anymore
- b) she threatens to sue the store
- c) she asks to speak with the manager
- d) all of the above

5) According to the author what group is caught shoplifting the most?

- a) black teenagers
- b) teenagers in general
- c) white teenagers
- d) black adults

6) The author relates an incident told to her by another writer. What happens in the incident?

- a) a black girl and a white girl were caught stealing
- b) two girls were accused of stealing even though they were innocent
- c) the white girl was caught stealing
- d) the black girl was accused of stealing

7) What were the outcomes of the two lawsuits filed against Macy's?

- a) the store won both cases
- b) the store lost both cases
- c) the store settled both cases before going to trial
- d) the cases are still pending

8) What changes does the writer think stores should make in their security procedures?

- a) she doesn't make any recommendations
- b) stores should hire more minorities
- c) stores should train sales people more carefully
- d) stores should hire more sensitive managers