

Crossroads of the World Young Person Introductions

Zimbabwe

Your name is Catherine Mwanda and you are 15 years old. You live in the city of Mutare, which is in Zimbabwe, one of the countries that make up the continent of Africa. Your mother is HIV+ and has been working hard to support your family for the past five years, since your father abandoned the family. You have two younger brothers, ages 9 and 7. Your mom's health has been slowly declining over the past several months and she hasn't been able to work a steady job for almost a year. Your family gets by on a very limited amount of money and the help of your neighbors. You and your brothers attend school in the city.

This morning you overheard your mother talking with someone. Your mom was telling a friend that she just found out that her HIV+ status has now developed into full blown AIDS. You know that this may keep your mother from working not only because she will be sick, but people also are afraid of the disease and will shun her. Since you are the oldest in your family you feel a great responsibility to help out. At school that day, you are very distracted and worried about your mom. You don't want her to have to worry so much about supporting the family, but you also don't want to leave school and all of your friends. You need to decide what you will do.

If you will quit school and look for work to support your family, go to #25. If you will stay in school, go to #27.

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The Holy Land

You are a seventh grade student named Riham. Your father works as a laborer in Israel and your mom takes care of you and your two brothers. Your family is Muslim and attends the village mosque regularly.

About 950 people live in your village, called Zeef, which is part of the Palestinian territory of the West Bank. The original village has been separated into two different parts by an access road (Route 60) built by the Israeli government. The road was built to provide a safer and more convenient way for the Jewish settlers to get to their homes. The Jewish settlement was built about 2 miles from your village but it is completely different from where you live. The settlers live in big beautiful houses in a neighborhood that looks a lot like a suburb in the U.S. There are community centers, synagogues, and, of course, running water, electricity, sewers, and garbage pick-up. In contrast, some of your village is connected to water and electricity, but it suffers from severe water shortages and poor electrical power. There is no sewer system or garbage collection and there are no paved roads in the village. It is not connected to a telecommunications network. The building of houses and other construction work is limited by the Israeli government in your village because of the Jewish settlement down the road.

You and your brothers go to school in the village. Like many schools in the West Bank, your school has no running water, no electricity and only goes to the 9th grade. You would very much like to continue your education past the 9th grade. To do so, you must attend the village school in Yatta, which is about four miles away. Your parents are supportive but have no means of transporting you back and forth to school. This is a real test for you. If your education is important, you'll walk the distance along the access road, Route 60, and continue your schooling. Otherwise, you'll remain in the village with your family and those friends who also complete their studies at the end of 9th grade.

To continue your education, go to #24. To stay in the village, go to #25.

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India

Your name is Ramaiya and you live in the village of Jummapur, India. At the age of six, your father sold your labor to a local farmer. It was a desperate situation and your father needed a loan in order to continue to support your family. He and your mother did not want you to have to work, but they didn't have another option. You are now 11 years old and you continue to work on the farm to pay off the loan that your father took out 7 years ago. Your job is to take the cattle out each day to graze. It is a long day and you are up early every morning, work all day, returning to the barn around 7 p.m. You live at the farm and only see your parents and four siblings a couple times a year.

Recently in your village, some of the adults have started to work to eliminate child labor. You do not know the specifics, but the adults are meeting with some of the leaders in the village, farmers, teachers, and parents. The whole effort is to get children back in to school so that they will be literate and educated. You find out about this when a man comes to you in the fields and asks you about your work and your family. He says that he will try to get you enrolled in school. You are very excited about the idea of going to school. You have always wanted to get an education. You know that it will help you to make more out of your life. The man asks you to talk with your parents about your desire to go to school.

When you do see your parents again, you let them know how much you want to go to school and ask them to allow you to do so. Your father understands your desire to go to school but doesn't know how your family could survive without the money that you earn. Your mother wants you to be able to go to school, but she doesn't have much say in the family. You know that the money is important to your family. You don't want to hurt them. On the other hand, you are now really excited about the idea of going to school.

If you will honor your father's wishes and continue to work for the farmer, go to #25. If, instead, you will sign yourself up for school against your father's wishes, go to #17.

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Haiti

Your name is Reginald Pierre, but everyone calls you Reggie. You are 14 years old and live in Port Au Prince in Haiti. Haiti is an island in the Caribbean, but it is hardly a tropical paradise like you might imagine. Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world. You have one older brother, three younger brothers, and two younger sisters. Your father works for the Police Department in Port Au Prince. You are very proud of him. A lot of the people in your city have very little, but your father's important job provides enough money to allow you and your siblings to attend a private school and live in a nice house. Your mother has not been feeling well lately and has just been diagnosed as HIV+. The doctor tells her that she must get your father tested too, but he is not feeling badly and refuses. Your mother begins to feel better with the help of medication and you are all hopeful that this will continue.

One day, upon returning home from school, you are confronted by your mother who is panicked and hysterical. She tells you that your father has been shot and killed by radical political activists. There has been political unrest and violence in Haiti for most of its history. This sort of thing happens all the time but it was not supposed to happen to your family.

Over the course of the next few months, without a steady income, your family runs low on money. Soon, you will be forced to move out of your house. Your mother looks for ways to support the family. She barely scrapes enough together to feed the family by selling sugar and soap and doing other people's laundry. You and your older brother are forced to look for work in order to help out. Working does not leave much time for school, not that it matters much. Without your father's income, your family won't be able to afford your private school next year anyway.

Things get pretty desperate as time goes on. You aren't making much money working, but it is a little. But you also know that if you weren't around the house, there would be more room and food for everyone else. You are not sure what you should do.

To stay at home and continue to work and care for the family along with your older brother and mother, go to #14. To leave home in the hope that you will somehow find a better existence and that your absence will make it better for your family go to #15.