

180 DAYS

YOUTH DISCUSSION GUIDE

A YEAR INSIDE AN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL



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INTRODUCTION

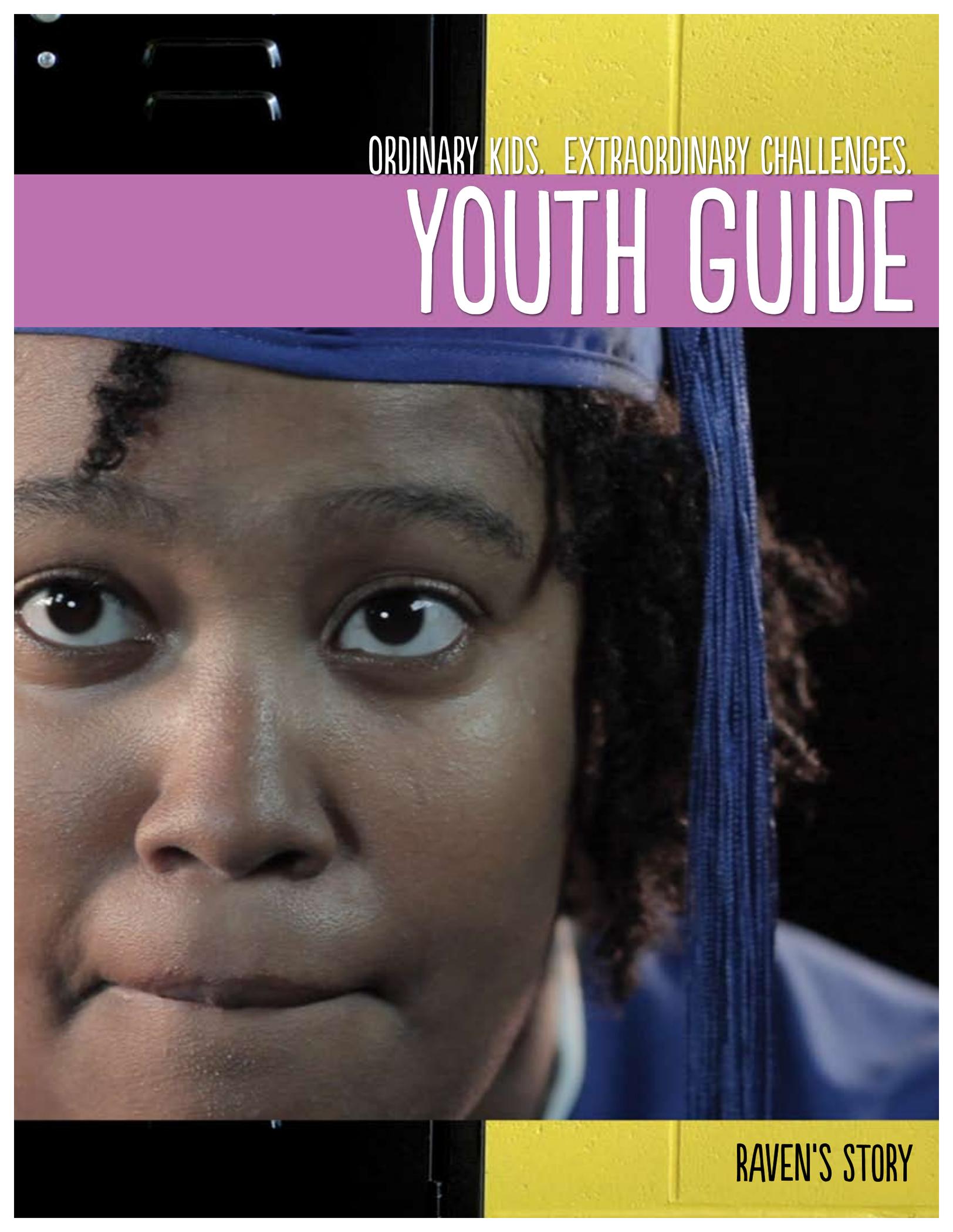
To youth and young people, Washington Metropolitan High School (DC Met) is an alternative school with a devoted staff. To district leaders, it is a failure. To many of the school's students, it is home – a safe haven from sometimes unsparingly difficult lives.

180 Days: A Year inside an American High School provides an intimate portrait of this fledgling school's day-to-day stories, condensing a full school year – 180 days – into four hours (2 two-hour episodes). The film invites viewers in for an unprecedented first-hand account of life inside of Washington, D.C.'s contentious school reform movement.

Staff and students at DC Met put a human face on policy debates. As teachers, administrators, and support staff struggle to help students navigate a wide range of life challenges – the death of a parent, becoming a parent, homelessness, violence, and more – they also work to help students succeed on mandated, standardized tests. The results of those tests affect more than just the students' futures; they will be used to determine teacher pay, school funding, and staff job security.

Accustomed to a district graduation rate that, for years has hovered near twenty-five percent, few people expect the students to do well. But the spirit and resilience of these “at risk” students defies expectations. In the end, thirty of forty-two seniors matriculate from DC Met – its first graduating class – every one of them accepted to college. Despite this triumph, the school's charismatic, outspoken, and much-beloved principal is fired, though no one from the district's central office has ever visited the school.

As a discussion tool for students, *180 Days: A Year inside an American High School* provides insight and encouragement without sugarcoating the realities faced by many urban schools. As a case study, it raises questions about how school reform efforts affect the lives of the very students that those reforms are intended to help. And it shows specific ways that teachers, coaches, counselors, and administrators attempt to make a difference in the lives of students each and every day.



ORDINARY KIDS. EXTRAORDINARY CHALLENGES.

YOUTH GUIDE

RAVEN'S STORY

ACTIVITY: RAVEN Q.

For groups watching the Raven Quattlebaum Character Sketch,

- a Prior to your screening, choose one of the prompts as a focus for viewing and/or
- b Kick-off a follow-up discussion with one of these questions:
 - What's your initial reaction to Raven Quattlebaum's story? Can any of you relate to portions or all of her story? How did you overcome your adversities?
 - Identify at least one thing you think Raven did well and one thing that you would have done differently. Why?
 - Raven's mom had a drug problem and became unable to care for Raven and her siblings. They were split up and put into foster homes. How do you think having a parent on drugs affects a student's success in school and in life?
 - DC MET students used poetry as a way to express themselves. How many of you use poetry/media as a way to express yourself? How important is it to have poetry and media programs in schools?
 - "My dreams are coming too slow, but my nightmares are coming too fast" That was a portion of Raven's poem that is featured in the film. What do you think she is trying to say?
 - Teens & Sexuality – Raven's mom is still not comfortable with her lifestyle choice but she loves her no matter what. What are some of the challenges for LGBTQ students at home, at school and/or in their community? Do you have any personal stories you are willing to share?
 - Teens & Gang Violence - Raven's story also includes gang violence. She admits to participating in gang activity. Is gang violence a problem in your school or community? What is being done to stop it? How can peers influence other peers to end it?
 - What are some of the ways Raven copes with her past gang violence and the death of friends.
 - ACT/SAT scores are how colleges/universities rank most students. However, Raven's tenacity and determination to overcome the challenges she has faced in her life represents her in a powerful, positive way. Do you think it's fair that some colleges/universities didn't admit her because of her test scores? Why/Why not? What does that say to you about the college admission process? In your opinion, what if anything should be changed?
 - How did you feel when Raven rang the bell to signal she was accepted into Bennett College?
 - After seeing a glimpse of Raven Quattlebaum life, if you ever had an opportunity to speak with Raven what would you say to her? Why? (Remember she is your peer.)