

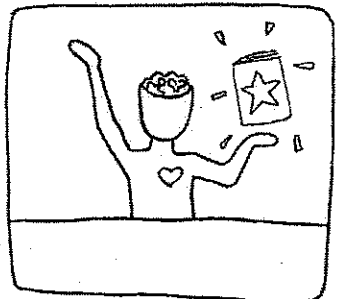
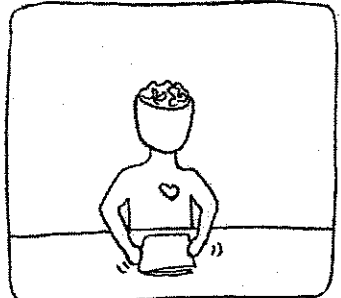
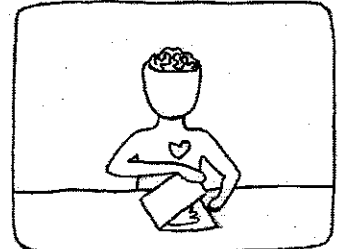
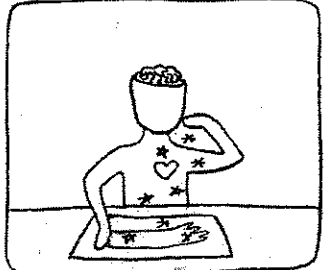
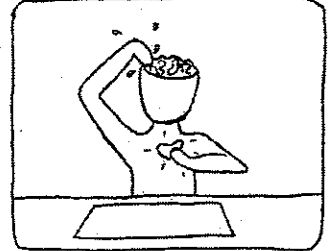
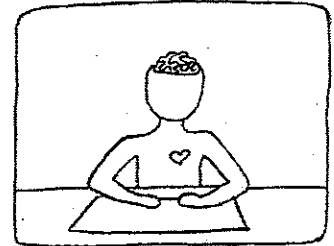
Zine Power!
Why Zines are Important for Teens

It made me feel powerful and informed. Less angry at myself for not being perfect, and more angry at the world for being so often fake or unfair. Those pamphlets were my *Catcher in the Rye*. The realization that I can create my own media and not just swallow whatever I was served was a big deal. Zines changed my expectations for what words can do. But it was hearing what people really thought, reading words on the page that were messy, raw, sometimes petty or misspelled, but real, real, real, that changed me. I've never changed back.

-- DesHarnais. 16

These powerful words written by Miriam DesHarnais, a self-proclaimed teen "zinester" in her youth, are a testament to the profound impact zines and zine culture can have in the life of a teenager. Historically, zines have been associated with revolutionary and social movements, in the form of leaflets, pamphlets, and manifestos that express beliefs and ideas not commonly shared by the political and social majority, and in a sense, modern zines still rally for the independent spirit, but on a somewhat smaller and intimate level, celebrating the rebellions of every day life. Many zines are similar to journals and relate the author's everyday experiences, while others are devoted to their particular hobbies, pastimes, and interests. Regardless of the subject matter, zines represent a diverse and innovative publishing format that is free from mainstream writing and publishing standards. Essentially, there are no rules, just a blank page and a whole lotta freedom!

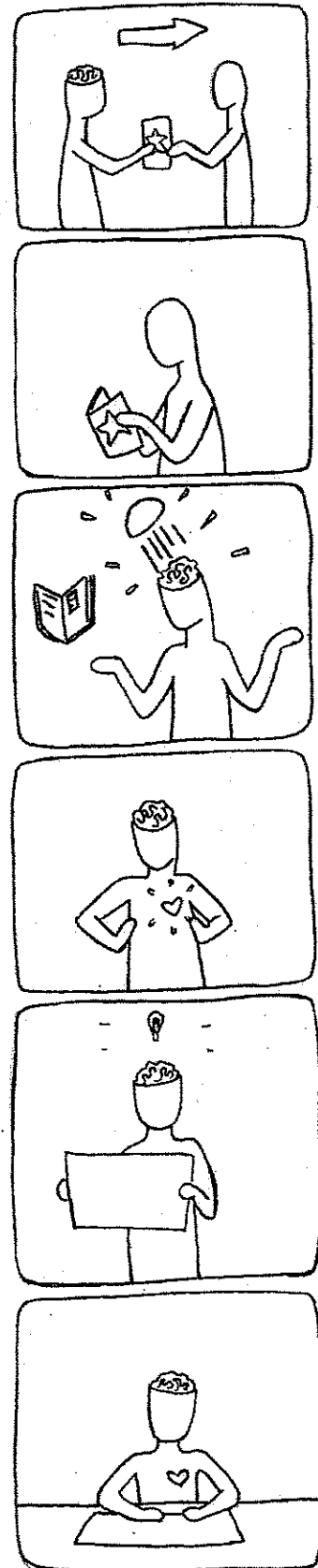
What more could a teen want? To be part of a counter-cultural movement with anarchist and radical undertones; it's a teenage dream! Who wouldn't want that? But I think the more significant question would be, who wouldn't want teens to have that? Well, parents, teachers, librarians, and pretty much anyone who has ever had to spend long periods of time with or around



teenagers, would cringe at the thoughts of teens joining a counter-cultural rebellion. You might be envisioning an angry teen mob running wild through the streets, protesting library late fees, homework, and curfews, but the reality is that this rebellion takes the form of words on a page, in a very unassuming and modest volume of personal thoughts and reflections, but powerful all the same.

Zines are part of an alternative community rooted within the DIY or Do-It-Yourself culture, which promotes and encourages self-empowerment through creativity, individuality, and self-expression. According to Julie Bartel, Teen Librarian at the Salt Lake City Public Library, at the core of zine culture is the belief that "anyone has the ability and everyone has the right to create meaningful content" (Bartel 22). The philosophy that underlies both zine and DIY culture is a sensibility shared by most teenagers: they want to be independent and they want to be taken seriously. DIY culture encourages teens to think critically about what they are reading, watching, and listening to in mainstream media, and zinemakers' main reason for creating zines of their own is the lack of relevant and interesting content in mainstream magazines. Anna Poletti writes that "zine culture is a productive community, a writing and publishing subculture which takes as one of its main focuses the critique of the commercialization of youth culture" (Poletti 184). Zines inspire teens to tell society who they are and what they believe and want, rather than allowing society to tell them who they are and what they want. Zines offer teens alternative viewpoints and diversity that is not present in the mainstream teen magazines.

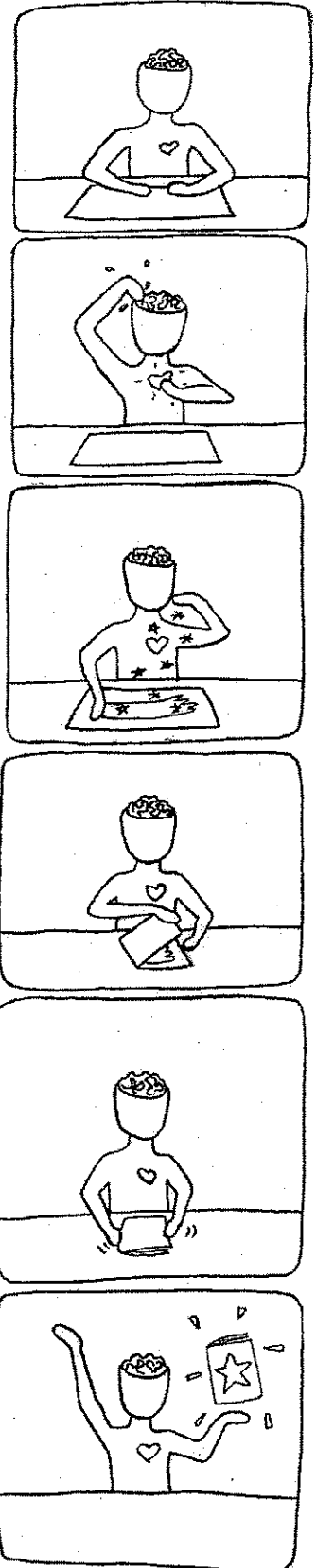
Denise Aulik, a high school English teacher at the Malcolm Shabazz City High School in Madison, Wisconsin who offers a course called The Zine Scene: Underground and Independent Publications to her students, sings the praises of all things zine and is an advocate for the promotion of zines to teens. In an article published on the American Library Association website, she writes, "Zine reading and writing production projects offer young adults a wealth of opportunities to actively explore their literacy development and challenge themselves (and



their audiences) to think beyond the book text and standard writing formats and styles" (Aulik, 2006). It is no secret that teens spend much of their teenage lives in a "not always quiet" rebellion against their parents, teachers, siblings, and everyone else in between. Their goal is to be heard and to be respected, as individuals with their own opinions and ideas. Zines, being part of an underground culture that defies both mainstream media and cultural standards, is a desirable form of media that teens can use to their own advantage, to set their own rules, to showcase their creativity and independent thinking, and to encourage a sense of pride and confidence in the achievement of a creating a meaningful piece of literature that will have a positive impact on themselves and their peers.

The benefits teenagers gain from reading and making zines are plentiful and fulfill several of the forty developmental assets that are deemed essential for positive teen development by the Search Institute. Most importantly, teens gain a sense of empowerment and positive identity. Creating zines allows teens to participate actively in their community, as well as interact with positive adult role models, who may assume the role of mentor, in the zine community. Positive Identity is very important in the personal development of a teenager, and, mainstream magazines, although being very popular amongst teens, do not often promote independent thinking and do not offer positive reinforcement. Teens are bombarded with air brushed images of perfect celebrities wearing the most recent fashion trends who are meant to be unattainable images of perfection and the message is not self-love, but self-attainment to industry standards. Self-publishing gives teens a sense of accomplishment and pride, in having the abilities to create something all their own, and gives them a greater sense of their potential as intelligent and ambitious citizens who have something to offer. A constructive use of time, a commitment to learning, and positive values are also assets that teens can gain from zine culture.

One of the greatest challenges facing youth services librarians is how to bring and keep teens in the library. Offering zine-making workshops as part of Teen Programming can be an



excellent strategy to encourage teens to visit the library and make the library a cool place to be. As an added bonus, teens gain a sense of self-empowerment, nourish their creative and independent spirit, and have a deeper appreciation of alternative forms of media, through which they can participate and express their thoughts, feelings, and ideas, in a safe, non-judgmental space.

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