

# TEENTEXT

## Leader Guide

*Youth Bible Study at its best!*



TEENTEXT *MIDDLE SCHOOL*  
GO DEEP. BE REAL. LET GO.



TEENTEXT *HIGH SCHOOL*  
GO DEEP. BE REAL. LET GO.

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# TeenText Contributors

*TeenText* **MIDDLE SCHOOL** and *TeenText* **HIGH SCHOOL**



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# Leader Guide

**TeenText Middle School**  
**TeenText High School**

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## What is TeenText?

TeenText is a lectionary-based resource for middle and high school youth. It is an adventure into the biblical stories! TeenText brings the stories to life with carefully crafted questions that engage youth and leaders alike. TeenText promotes discussion, critical thinking and creative listening. It brings movies, TV, art, music, poetry, literature, and current events “into dialogue” with the Bible story.

Simply put, it connects the text with teens’ real lives!

## TeenText goals:

- To create a safe space where youth can dig into the story, ask the tough questions, and value their own interpretations of the text.
- To enable youth to discover the uniqueness of their own stories, and how their stories relate to God’s.
- To encourage youth to go deep and take chances.
- To make it okay to be uncomfortable or puzzled by biblical stories.

## How is TeenText different from other resources?

TeenText is about questions, not answers.

TeenText does not suggest a “right way” to interpret the story.

The TeenText way of teaching is called “maieutic” from the Greek word for “midwife”. Behind our method is the belief that we all carry within us the archetypal stories of the Bible, and by working with carefully-worded questions, the learner can connect the biblical story with his/her own life. TeenText helps youth get out of their heads and into their hearts. Over time, the TeenText process helps them see the Bible as a vital, dynamic, relevant resource, one that can inform them all throughout their lives.

## What is Go Deep, Get Real, Let Go?

**Going deep** means digging into the story and not just seeing what is most evident. It means crawling around in the text until it starts working on you. It’s reading the text over and over, acting it out, talking about it until it starts to come to life. And it means “reading the Bible again for the first time” to borrow from Marcus Borg.

**Being Real** is about connecting the story to the world around us. It’s about recognizing how this narrative is playing out still, today, all the world over. It’s about understanding how powerful and alive the bible stories still are...thousands of years later.

**Letting Go** refers to the activities, music, film, movement and other ways of encountering the story and responding to it. It’s about letting go of old notions of what the story means and letting in new perspectives. It’s about letting go of expectations and being open to surprises. It’s about letting the story “have its way with you”. Letting Go means mustering up the courage to be willing to be transformed by sacred scripture.

## What does Cost and Promise mean?

We often use the terms “cost” and “promise” to zero in on the CHOICES presented to us in a story.

Take the Lazarus story. He’s dead and in the tomb. Jesus arrives on the scene. He goes to the tomb and loudly says, “Lazarus, come out!”

TeenText might ask, “What would it cost Lazarus to come out of his tomb?” In other words, what does Lazarus LOSE if he chooses to come back to life?

Then we might ask, “What’s the promise in Lazarus’ choosing to leave the tomb and come back to life?” In other words, what will Lazarus GAIN?

Then, the questions might reverse: “What’s the cost of staying in the tomb?” and “What’s the promise?” What might Lazarus GAIN by remaining entombed? And what might he LOSE?

This line of questioning is meant to help youth realize that with every choice and decision, there is something to gain and something to lose. We believe that looking at stories in this way uncovers the options that *real people had in real life situations*. And we believe that we have the same kinds of options today.

## What is the role of the TeenText leader?

TeenText leaders are NOT EXPECTED TO:

- Be biblical scholars!
- Have all the answers!

TeenText leaders ARE EXPECTED TO:

Prepare for the session:

- review the text and background (Entering the Story)
- preview any music, film, art, or other auxiliary materials for appropriateness
- set up the classroom space.

Listen, listen, listen.

Be willing to be surprised!

Be willing to grow in their own spiritual awareness.

Meet the youth where they are....not where you THINK they are!

Encourage youth to go deep, get real and let go!

Invite youth to take on *leadership* roles. By suggesting movie clips, music, TV, videos, current events or questions, the youth themselves take ownership of the process.

TRUST that your youth know a lot!

**REMEMBER:** each TeenText session flows like a discussion among friends—going from the safe and casual to the deeper and more personal sharing. **REMEMBER:** the people in the stories were real people with real feelings, fears, hopes and dreams. Often the questions will ask youth to *imagine what a character in the story might have felt*. Role playing, acting out the story, is a great way to get under the words and into the feelings.

**HELPFUL HINT:** use the words in the story itself to help youth make connections—that is, to think metaphorically about the text. This is how they discover that these ancient sacred stories are still alive and kicking!

## What's included in each week's lesson plan?

Each week's lesson includes:

1. Setting the Stage: A list of all materials you may need to guide the session.
2. Today's Text: The weekly biblical text.
3. Entering the Story: Relevant historical background on the text—any information necessary to put the story in its original context. (For instance, the parable of the prodigal son has more impact if the youth know the cultural significance of pigs and inheritance customs.)
4. Exploring the Story: Open-ended questions that get youth into the story by asking:
  - What is actually taking place in the story? Who are the characters? What's the setting? The aim is to hear the story "for the first time" even if you know the story by heart. **GOING DEEP**, digging deeply into the story.
  - Where is this story taking place in the world around us? In our school? Our church? Our country? Among our friends? Why and how is this story relevant today? What difference does it make? **BEING REAL**, getting into the story by seeing it as a current reality.
  - How is this story my own story? How am I like these characters? How is my life "plot" like this biblical plot? What part of me is like the prodigal son? What part of me is like the son who stayed at home and played by the rules? **LETTING GO** is letting the story work within you, letting the story become part of you, allowing the story a place in your heart, not just your head.
5. Exploring Further: Suggested activities that help connect the text to the teen and are age-appropriate. Suggested music, video, film clips, visual art and/or other cultural offerings that may shine another light on the text.
6. Between Sundays: Additional questions for continued "during the week" reflections on the text.

## How are the sessions organized?

This is what a typical session might look like, although you are encouraged to adapt to suit your group's needs.

1. Opening ritual: Gather in a circle and light a candle in the center of the circle. It is important to arrange the youth in a circle, where everyone is equal and all are important. The lighting of the candle can serve as a prayer of invocation. You might say, "we light the candle to remind us of the presence of God among us, between us and within us". *The candle is central to the method, and we use it to symbolize the story that sits in the center of the group and offers its light.*
2. Review TeenText Guidelines: These guidelines help ensure that dialogue, not debate, drives the discussion. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the day's questions. All answers are valid, and no consensus or agreement on what the story *means* is necessary. It will mean something different to each youth.
  - "I" statements are encouraged.
  - Pauses between responses are important.
  - The goal is not consensus, agreement, or "right answer".
  - You do not have to explain, justify or defend anything you say.
  - You can change your mind as often as you like.
  - Silence is vital to the process. It is okay if nobody talks.
  - What is shared in the group stays in the group.
3. Today's Text/Encountering the Story:
  - Have youth read the text silently.
  - Have one person read the text aloud while others close their eyes and try to "hear" the story as if for the first time.
  - Have a second person (it's good to have a boy and a girl read) read the text aloud while others close their eyes.
4. Work with the questions:
  - GO DEEP - what's happening in the story?
  - BE REAL - how is this happening the world around me?
  - LET GO - how is this story my own story?

### HELPFUL HINTS:

Don't expect to use all the questions provided  
Allow for silences and reflections.  
Ask "how do you FEEL" rather than "what do you think".  
Avoid suggesting a meaning for the text.  
Listen to responses carefully and ask relevant follow-up questions.  
Have fun and don't forget to use your sense of humor!

5. Present the "Between the Sundays" questions.
6. End with closing ritual. Gather in a circle around the lit candle. While holding hands, express gratitude for the gathering, the insights, the laughter, the fun, the sharing. Ask for guidance in working with the story during the week. Together, lean in and blow out the candle!

Please email us at [info@educationalcenter.org](mailto:info@educationalcenter.org) or give us a call at 704.375.1161 if you have questions.