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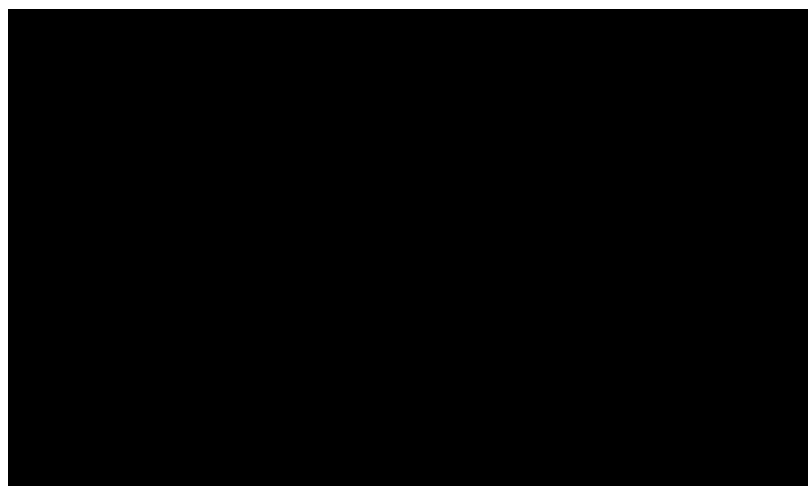
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ROXBURY

## Hub students' book on teen life earns actor Steve Carell's praise

Posted by Matt Rocheleau June 7, 2011 04:43 PM

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(Courtesy: Continuum & 826 Boston: Behold)

A video highlighting the collaboration of local students, writing tutors, and a design firm to create the book.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Sixty-one Boston high schoolers will release a compilation of short stories this week about the transition from childhood to teenager to young adult -- from the thrill of a first kiss to the sobering struggle of being raised in a broken home.

The tales -- some entirely true, some entirely fictional, and others a mix of both -- received praise from actor Steve Carell. Recently-departed star of "The Office" TV show, the Massachusetts native was contacted -- through a friend of a friend -- by a professional author who helped coach the student writers.

"This smart, honest, touching collection by talented teen writers addresses the universal yearning to belong, to feel proud of the ones we love, and to love ourselves," Carell writes in the book's foreword. "You would think these things would come naturally, but really, they don't. Especially not in high school."

The book -- "We think You're Old Enough to Know" -- was written over the course of one year by sophomores at the [John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science](#) with the help of [826 Boston](#), a nonprofit in Egleston Square which helps tutor creative writing to young students. Through a \$14,000 grant and volunteered time, Newton-based design firm [Continuum](#) worked with the

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students to create the colorful 150-page book's look.

On Monday morning, about half of the book's young authors in O'Bryant teacher Ian Doreian's honors English class described the at-times "annoying," though in the end rewarding process of having to revise draft after draft of their stories.

For some, simply explaining their story to teachers and peers proved to be a challenge.

"My story was really personal. I cried once," reading it to others, said Andreina Nieves, 16 of Roslindale. "When it was time to edit, I was like, 'why did I pick this one.'"

Nieves said the story is about how as a young child she became attached to her older sister's hand-me-down ballet shoes and worried later on that she and her sister would grow distant when they stopped taking the dance lessons together.

Judnise Guillet wrote about how as a first-grader she threw up on a classmate's hair and passed out from a mix of exhaustion and embarrassment.

"It's uncomfortable for someone else to read it," the 16-year-old Roslindale student said.

Suzette Schand wrote a story that touched on personal experiences between her and her father.

"It was really awkward," Schand remembered when she handed her very first draft to one of the writing mentors. "I had a tutor that didn't interpret it they way I'd meant it at all."

But, "as the weeks went on, it got better and better so people could understand it. It was difficult, but it was worth it," said the 16-year-old from Dorchester.

And while some stories were entirely fictional, the students said that each piece touches on real-life situations that their peers and others can identify with in some way.

Jelissa Pimentel crafted a fictional tale about an immigrant girl assimilating to life in New York City. The character lies about her heritage in an attempt to fit in before later discovering her peers don't judge her for her family's background, but instead were curious and somewhat amazed by the cultural differences, the 16-year-old student author from East Boston and of Dominican descent said.

Sixteen-year-old Emily Prado wrote about a boy who is raised by same-sex parents.

"I made it up. But still it's a real issue that some kids deal with," said Prado of Roslindale. "Our stories, when put together, they tell the story of teenage life, the things we have to deal with. A lot the readers will be able to relate to it."

The English teacher and his students praised the professionalism of both the writing tutors and members of the design firm. He said they'd often work hours beyond their scheduled volunteer time.

"That gives me energy as a teacher to push the students to think of themselves as writers, as authors," said Doreian.

Students first read published short stories written by well-established authors

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so they could better study and brainstorm how to write their own. The teens then spent around eight rigorous weeks, both during in-class exercises and through homework assignments, drafting their own tales, said 15-year-old Marilyn Pineda.

A group of eight of the young writers made big picture decisions, including determining the book's overall flow, said one of the board's members Sandra Chen, 16, of the South End. The book is divided into five categories, explained 16-year-old Lawrence Lei of the Back Bay: belonging, defiance, family, sorrow and relationships.

"The power of this book is not only in its beautiful final form, but also in the process by which it was created," 826 Boston program director Lindsey Plait Jones said of the book creation process in an announcement. "The book is a testament to what smart students can do with dedicated support from talented adults and a modicum of funding."

Students will sell and sign book copies at a release party at the Roxbury Center for Arts at Hibernian Hall Wednesday at 8 p.m. The book, along with previous student publications through 826 Boston, can also be purchased online, [here](#).

While none of the student authors have met or spoken directly with Carell, Doreian says invitations have been sent to their Hollywood endorser to attend the release celebration.

"We're still holding out hope," to meet with the actor, the teacher said.

And Carell has a few coming of age stories of his own, including one he shares in the book's foreword and also told New York Magazine about last spring when the movie he co-starred in, "Date Night," premiered.

Describing his worst dating experience as a 15-year-old, he told the magazine: "We went to a Jethro Tull concert. I was a sophomore in high school and I shook her hand good night," which ended the first and last date Carell had with the girl, who he was friends with, though afterward their relationship became awkward.

He continued: "My brothers mocked me endlessly for that."

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