



Imani McGregor, 14



Roscoe Mclean, 16



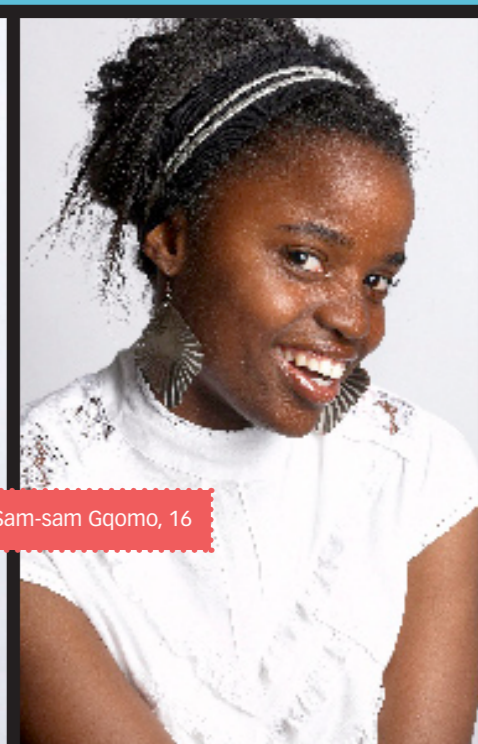
Lauren Bhana, 16



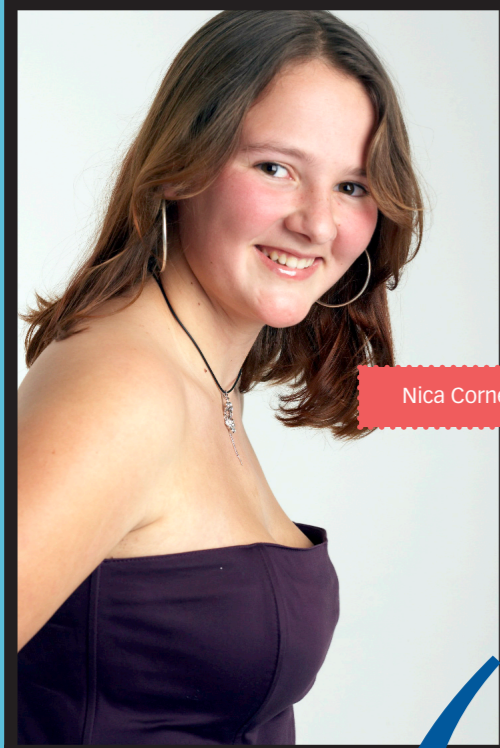
Kate Wills, 15



Themba Jack, 14

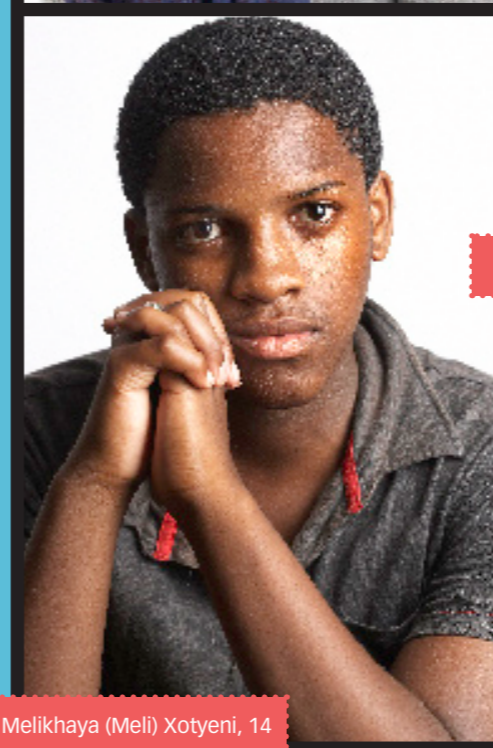


Sam-sam Gqomo, 16



Nica Cornell, 15

Girls are kissing girls. MXIT rules. Zuma's bad news but we'll make it anyway. God is great. And if sex is not quite on our radar, it will be soon. Here's what South Africa's young teenagers are thinking (and doing)...



Melikhaya (Meli) Xotyeni, 14



Nina Brown, 16



Thomas von Zahn, 15

state of the (teen)

NATION



kate, 15

I am pretty laid-back, not a party person. I prefer to read and travel.

My earliest memory is eating pancakes with chilli powder in our home in Johannesburg. I thought it was cinnamon, and it got so hot I had to blow into milk to get rid of the taste. My mom's idea!

South Africa is the most beautiful country in the world. It is a huge part of me and I am deeply connected to the soul of Africa. It's odd because my dad comes from Australia and so I suppose we could move if we wanted to. But I don't want to. This is my home.

We are producing amazing people but we now need a true leader who can inspire greatness. South Africa is not going to crash and burn. We are too strong and powerful for that.

I actually met Zuma once and he seemed like such a nice guy. But he has made some stupid mistakes, and I don't think he is right for President, so he probably needs to move out of politics.

I go to a Christian school but I'm not religious. I respect that religion helps people but it seems to be more of a dividing thing that a uniting thing. And in its extremes, religion is very dangerous.

Love is a feeling of belonging. But I think I am too young for that one. You have to know yourself first.

Boys have asked me out but I am too young. Maybe later. Some of my friends are dating, and [as far as I know] none of my close friends are having sex. But 3 or 4 of the other girls in my grade are.

None of us are drinking



melikhaya, 14

I am an only child. My parents are busy getting divorced. I am very musical and want to be a jazz musician when I get older.

I believe in God, but I am not overly religious. I don't go to church (well, maybe three times a year) but my mum is a great believer.

Crime is way out of control. There seems to be so much corruption, poverty and violence. Zuma is awful. I mean, he's an alleged rapist [Zuma has been acquitted] and is on trial for corruption. How on earth can he become President? I think he will be found guilty. And Cyril Ramaphosa should be president.

I am not leaving this place,

so we'd better make it right.

Some of my peer group are having sex – or so they tell us! But we all know about it. Lots of kids my age are drinking and smoking. Parents have no idea.

I don't read, but my favourite movie is 'Die Another Day'.

Global warming is going to affect us, no doubt. I don't really do much to help, but I do save electricity and make environmentally friendly choices day to day.

Love must be a warm feeling, where one feels safe to express anything. I have liked someone before, but that's not love. Love is actually just a promise.

In ten years... I'll be a classically trained jazz musician, liv-

nina, 14

I am a happy gal, hippy-like and full of energy.

I am Jewish but I believe that there is one God called different things by different religions. God is greater than all of us and has a special plan for each individual.

Our future is up to our generation, and we have the power to make good change in South Africa.

I want to travel and I guess I will end up studying here and then moving overseas to work and live for a while. Whatever I do, I will always be South African.

I know all about sex, but only from a biological perspective! If I am in a loving, trusting, healthy, stable relationship, then sex is part of that process.

Some of my girlfriends are kissing girls as well but they are not gay. It's a fashionable type of thing out there at the moment. I don't really worry about who is gay or not, rather, who is happy or not.

I have little sips of champagne on special occasions but drinking is rife at school. I know of some Grade 8's who are drinking heaps. They seem to be drinking much earlier these days, and drinking to get drunk seems to be the main objective.

I am more of a movie addict than a bookworm. If I have to name my favourite book, it would be The Five People You Meet in Heaven. Other than that, I just have to see every movie on the circuit.

I use Facebook for my international friends and MXit for local – probably about one hour a day for both. But primary communication skills must be intact first (i.e. face to face).

I am very aware of the devastation caused by global warming. I am not saving the whales or trees, but I do my bit. I switch off plugs, save electricity where possible and try not to ever pollute. I don't want my kids to be fried by the sun!

Love is... '...when your soul recognizes its counterpart in another'.

My parents have a deep love and I believe in marriage. If you experience true, true love, I think you are very lucky.

In ten years... I'll be finished studying, with a career in publishing; happy, close to marriage and living in the US.

The world is... developing.



nica, 15

Life has given me a few knocks, and I have been tested, but [those knocks] have made me who I am and taught me the meaning of strength. **I have a close inner family** (me, my brother of 8, and my mum and dad, stepmother and sister of 2) and a wonderful extended family (19 cousins). My mum is an active member of society, having been in politics, and my father is a musician. They are divorced. I am part of a clan and experience a great sense of belonging. **South Africa will always be my home.** I will travel and yearn for other experiences, but I will always return. I am not ignorant about the problems here, and I understand how people want to leave, but if we all leave, who's going make it better? **As a country, we need to move on**, create a new reality and realise how far we have come. Good citizens outnumber the criminals, so we can beat the crime. **I don't follow a particular religion** but I have lots of faith in a higher power. I use cards; I embrace the idea of Buddhism, Wicca, Paganism and the teachings of Christ. I see a lot of beauty around and it has to come from somewhere profound. **My gran had a massive influence on me.** She was [is she still alive?] a converted Catholic and was always connected to a higher power. Her faith that we are a part of a greater good inspires me to believe the same. I once listened to Archbishop Tutu and that was simply amazing. But there are too many rules in the Christian faith.



And God may not be male. I prefer the concept of Goddesses, Saints and energies. **The meaning of sex has been warped.** It's meant to be about love, trust, beauty and togetherness, but somewhere along the way, it's changed. I know some people who have had sex, but the percentage is not high. **I had a boyfriend for eight months and I did fall in love**, but I got tired of being half of a whole. I needed to have more freedom. **It's important to me what a man laughs at.** He must have an opinion, want to keep discovering new things, be sensitive yet strong and he must always challenge me. **There was a time when I was spending up to five hours a day on MXit** but then my cellphone got stolen and I realised how much of my consciousness I was spending on it, and I have withdrawn from it almost completely. I prefer real time and to be present. **I read all the time**, and

thomas, 15

I like to think I am someone who is sophisticated and smart – not in a bigheaded sort of way, but just lucky, I guess. I just really enjoy my life. **I'm not religious.** I am an agnostic. **Every Friday night is different**, but we socialise at friends' homes, or go to movies. There are also parties and there is some drinking that goes on, but not anything too extreme. **I belong to an active environmental group at school.** We take on meaningful projects like making our school 100% eco-friendly. We should all be worrying a lot more about our environment. **I don't know what I want to do in life yet**, but I think something in the psychology line, and I do enjoy writing. I am also in the debating public speaking group at school and spend a lot of time doing work with the Outreach Interact group where we have been focusing on working with the handicapped. **I read a lot**, and my recent favourite is Breaking Vega [can't find] **My favourite movie** has to be The Dark Knight. Heath Ledger was awesome. **MXit is really just a social tool for me**, and I

tend to use it only when I am bored. Facebook – I use it while I am doing homework, as a secondary function. **I want to stay here in South Africa.** It is my place of birth and I have a natural attachment to and love for it. Everyone seems to be looking at all the bad things happening here, but this needs to be balanced with the good stuff too. **There seems to be an overreaction towards Zuma.** He may be president – so be it. We will see it through as a country. We always do. **The world is ... meandering.**



PHOTOGRAPHS: ?????

sam sam, 14



I come from a great family. My folks are still together and I have an older sister. **We are only here to serve God** – and we do so through our talents. There is only one God, and we will all be judged according to our lives on earth. Every bad thing that happens on earth is here to test our faith. I go to a Charismatic Christian church and love it. **No sex before marriage for sure.** There are too many risks – Aids, pregnancy... shoo! We all talk about sex so we know about it, and of course, we are all curious. **Some girls in our grade are**

having sex, and there is a new release of gay girls – it seems to be in these days – girls kissing girls is fashionable. I am much too much of a health nut to bother with drink and drugs. Actually, I am just a nut. I need all my energy to enjoy life. **I am out of here**, straight to the US of A, where there is more opportunity. **I use MXit for about two hours a day.** But it hasn't taken the place of normal communication, it's just added to our social networking. **I can't wait to fall in love.** All-out emotions are linked to love and there is nothing negative about it. **In ten years time** I'll be married, back from a world tour, would have appeared on Top Billing, or Oprah

melikhaya, 14

My family is great. I have an 11-year-old sister. My dad was a political activist and my mum is the daughter of a Bishop. **There is no God.** I don't go to Church. **I don't like to talk about sex** – especially not to my parents. We are too young and it's kind of a silly subject for me right now. **I will stay in South Africa.** If Zuma gets in, there will be little hope left, but we will survive as a country. We always have. We need action on global warming. It's a very strong subject at school. We are taught all about how to save the planet and I do listen and act upon that. But I don't belong to any active groups that lobby for the environment. Perhaps that is what we need. **Love is...** something I fear. I could get hurt. **I don't read books**, only magazines. **In ten years...** I'll be a music teacher,





imani, 14

My parents were separated when I was 14 months old. **My greatest experience to date** was standing up on a surfboard for the first time!

South Africa is full of crime. Looming elections will ensure change and, I hope, for the better. I look forward to that change.

The press has painted Zuma in a bad light. If he became president, I would consider leaving the country, but I would like to give him a chance too.

It's important that our leaders talk to us about global warming. We should all be collaborating for solutions. Distant treaties are not going to make any difference at all.

I pray but I don't go to church. Religion is more about how you behave than anything else. There are many hypocritical Christians around, but I like to think that I am tolerant of all beliefs.

My age group is a bit young to be thinking of sex but I do know of people who are doing it. We are very aware of HIV/Aids.

All my friends are on MXit and it is an affordable way of communicating. I don't go on chatrooms at all.

My favourite book is My Sister's Keeper by Jodi Piccolt.

I am quite creative. I think I'd find interior design or architecture fascinating. I also love drawing, so perhaps some-



lauren, 16

I am a quiet type of person, from a religious background, and am very conservative. My parents are still together and have a great influence over my life.

I am a strong [committed??] Catholic and believe in only one God, a Christian one. How can anyone not believe in God? I have yet to go on a real date. I prefer to stay at home and read, or just chill with some mates. And no, I haven't had a boyfriend yet!

I am definitely not going to have sex before I am married, and I don't drink alcohol because I know that too much leads to casual sex, and in any case, it's not legal at my age. At school, there are a group of girls who stick together and we all know they are not virgins because they tell us.

Love is a special feeling that makes you excited. We can't survive without love – but falling in love too early is dangerous because we are not able to process all those emotions yet.

Marriage is the only way to commit to one another. But love must come first.

I know about global warming but I don't see many ways in which it affects me (yet). I am much more worried about crime and violence.

South Africa is not in a very good state now. Leaders appear hypocritical and I feel despondent. As a singer, I have to consider the possibility of moving to (probably) America. I will be sad to leave but will probably have no other option.

I don't really read much, but when I do I choose an inspirational book.

My favourite movie is High School Musical, or Step Up.

My best experience was when I went to Jerusalem and Egypt. It resonated in my religious soul.

In ten years... I'll be overseas, singing solo.

The world is... restless.

roscoe, 16

I come from a well-balanced stable family, and I'm a brother to Kelly and Rae, who are twins. Our parents are together and happy.

I am a traditional Christian but have great tolerance for other views. It's a pity that so many wars are around religion.

I want to be an engineer, probably aeronautical.

I know more than enough about sex, having come from a boarding school environment, and all boys talk. I have had girlfriends, but from a moral and religious perspective, I will wait until I am married to have sex. Lots of boys are already having sex and that's just fine.

I have no problem with gay people, but I do have a problem with this new-age thing where people have sex with both sexes. It's become a sex thing, not a relationship thing. I can't understand how you can be attracted to both sexes. But it's fairly common.

If Zuma becomes president, we will improve dramatically and then after a few years, we will fail as a nation. I know it seems like I have no hope, but I can't see us booming. I will leave by 2011, either to the UK or to Canada, either to play sport or to work.

The effects of global warming are all around us. It is so evident, but for me there are bigger issues right now. I don't really take it into my life yet. I cycle a lot to places I need to go to, and I don't actively destroy the environment. I think it will come right. There are enough scientists working on the problem.

Love is... bigger than just an emotion. I would NEVER say "I love you" lightly.

The best book of all time for me is The Sum of All Fears by Tom Clancy

Favourite movie is 'We Were Soldiers' – it's far more than just a war movie.

I only do Facebook when I am bored. I spend about hour and a half a day collectively on MXit.

My best experience has been boarding at Maritzburg College for 6 years. In ten years... I'll be playing sport at

PHOTOGRAPHS: ????