

## CLASS HANDOUT NY-6 NEW YORK, READING 16

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Juan Gonzales and Peter Quinn, two seventeen-year-old boys, live in the same New York City neighborhood. They are both high school seniors in the same school district, both Catholics in the same parish, both ballplayers with the same parks and school yards at their disposal. That they do not know each other is an urban commonplace; that they are utter strangers in the conditions of their lives, in their vision of what they themselves are, seems a personal illustration of the apparent failure of the American melting pot.

## FAMILY

## JUAN GONZALES

. . .My mother wanted us . . .to know our real father. But I stopped seeing him. First of all, I didn't like him because I remembered what he had done to me and my sisters and my little brother and my mother in Puerto Rico. Down there, my mother would be slaving over the stove and we would be outside playing in the mud or something. Then he'd come in drunk. He'd start beating her up. She would be crying and then he'd come at us and he would beat us up. And this went on for a long time, until my mother couldn't take it any more.

## PETER QUINN

. . .In a way; my father tries to protect us from getting burned by good discipline. Then the other side of this is that my father is always fair. I never resented even a spanking because whenever I got one, my parents were always sure that I needed it, that I'd really done something I needed to be straightened out about. I could see it myself.

## PEER GROUPS

## JUAN GONZALES

Of course, you get things in there if you do join a gang. First of all, you won't be bothered by this gang that you're joining. That's one. Second of all, you have protection. And there, you belong. You know that always comes up. You belong. You know, maybe your mother and father don't care, but one of these boys, if you plan to run away or something, they'll give you money or they'll keep you in their house for a while. You develop a friendship like brothers. Then, if you both think evil, that's what you do. You either run away together or do something that's against the law together or if you get caught, you get caught together. No one's going to run away from his buddy and leave him there with the cops. . . .

## PETER QUINN

Of course, there's quite a large group of us, too, who go to church, club meetings and play ball together and maybe go to dances together or date. But we are not any kind of fighting group. Nobody among us likes to fight, and we'll do anything we can to stop one. . . .We decided that if we ever fought those boys (from the projects) everyone of us would be killed, really. Those Puerto Rican and colored kids from the projects can get so many others of their own kind in such a short time, it's really unbelievable. They get them from all over the city in a few hours by telephone, telling them what's going on. It's short of a chain. . . .

(CONTINUATION)

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EDUCATION

JUAN GONZALES

. . .A few of us stay and maybe we get to graduate, but it doesn't do much good. Nobody has the right training; most of them, even when they graduate, can't read or write too good. They can't go to college; they haven't got the right training for a trade. I could go into the motor service and maybe learn to be a better mechanic. Anyway, I can study there. . . .

Even if I could, by taking courses at night and get some money help, I think I'd have a big problem with college. I don't know how I could respond to it. College is a whole new thing. Maybe I wouldn't do so good. Suppose I would flunk out after all this time of struggling and working and wishing. . . .

PETER QUINN

The kind of sales job I would like would need a good college degree the way my brother and my father have. My brother told me an experience of his, when he got his job. He went to a large company's personnel office and there was a line of men waiting to apply for a very good position. Well, the secretary came out of her office and asked if there were any college graduates. There were three men who put up their hands, plus my brother, and they were ushered in, given great treatment, and allowed to apply right there. My brother got a job from them without any trouble about a week later while all the other people sitting out in the waiting room never even got a chance to tell their qualifications.

College would give me a lot more, too. I think you are much more worldly minded and know more about people if you're a college graduate. Usually you take psychology and sociology and you know how to cope with people and with life much better.

GOALS AND IDEALS

JUAN GONZALES

Me, I'm Puerto Rican, colored, and I'm not going to turn my back on that, but if you ask me, if I could say, "Which would you rather be?" Well, I mean, you've got to face it. I mean anybody would. If you ask me, which I'd rather be, well, man, I'd rather be white.

PETER QUINN

. . .(W)e go our own way, having a very good time, learning a lot, and preparing for life. Even when I think very hard, I wouldn't want to live anywhere else than where I live now. I love the block, the park, the neighbors. I am completely happy with my life. I've had a good life so far. Nothing dramatically wrong with it. Lots of laughs, lots of fun.