

Hi, My name is Micah Winterstein.

This is my first year teaching Youth Court at Strawberry Mansion. This has been one of the best experiences of my young teaching career. In Youth Court I teach kids not only the Youth Court process and how to hold hearings but I teacher them life lessons. Our kids are faced every day with decisions that they are not prepared to handle. Growing up in North Philly our students face circumstances that are not normal for teenagers but they know nothing else. The skills needed to survive their neighborhood are completely different than those needed to be successful in school. Most of our kids do not have someone to show them both.

In youth court we try and tackle those issues. Issues of snitching, peer pressure, what we define as success and abuse of all kinds. The one thing I was lucky enough not to have to teach my kids was empathy. My students are passionate and understanding. The most difficult part of youth court is coming up with the alternative. How can we untrain our brains from what we have been taught our whole lives. I get to see my kids push themselves and discover new ways of handling problems. These are solutions that could one say save their life.

I once told my kids “to get out of the hood, you have to think differently than the hood”. It wasn’t as black and white as I once thought. Teaching Youth Court I learned that I can’t deny the hood has taught my kids to understand someone else’s’ struggle. It has taught them to be tough and never give up. But to obtain a better life our kids still need more. Youth Court provides a space for kids to think differently. We all need to think differently sometimes. Life isn’t black and white, suspension or detention; there are layers we must uncover to move kids forward.