For Teens, It's Curfew Time...at the Mall

Its 3 p.m. Time for the evening lockdown. A dozen security guards, several police officers, and the local sheriff line the nondescript hallways. They each stake out an entrance, making escape from their wary gaze nearly impossible. Those not watching the exits are wandering the corridors, searching for suspicious-looking characters.

One security guard heads towards a particularly dangerous-looking suspect: a 16-year-old girl dressed to kill. The guard gruffly instructs the young woman, Liz, to turn around and head back the way she came. But Liz isn't trying to escape, nor is she a troublemaker. "I just need to get a shirt for my dad's birthday," she explains. Liz is not a criminal, and the guards and police are not trying to keep people in. They're trying to keep children and teens like Liz out – out of the shopping mall. The mall is the Saint Louis Galleria, located in a wealthy, relatively safe suburb. But this scene could have been played out in more than 40 major shopping centers across the country. These citadels of capitalism have adopted what the Galleria terms a "parental guidance required" policy, where anyone under 17 must be accompanied by someone 21 or older.

Those possessing the badges of youth – carrying a backpack, or wearing baggy jeans or a micro-mini – are asked to produce an ID when entering the mall on Friday and Saturday evenings. Youngsters already shopping without an adult at the curfew hour, which at the Galleria is 3 p.m., are asked to leave by mall security.

The policy has stirred up emotion and controversy among teens, parents, and others and raises age-old questions: How do you create a safe shopping
environment without singling out one group – in this case, teens? Will a curfew really bring more civility to the aisles of Ann Taylor and Aéropostale? And, most important, what will happen to the mall as mecca for millions of teen pilgrims who journey there by foot, bus, and minivan to socialize and to participate in America's obsession and economic lifeline – shopping?

Behind the curfews is the occasional violence at some shopping centers across the country – and, more common, the boisterous behavior of cliques of teens, who often scare off adult consumers. Just last month, for instance, a 14-year-old girl was slashed in the stomach during a fight at the country's premier indoor bazaar, the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minn.

Such incidents are rare at the über-shopping center – officials say this is only the second act of violence in the past 18 months – but they weren't always so unusual. In 1995, the Mall of America reported 300 "incidents" involving youths. The following year officials there instituted one of the nation's first mall curfews. The number of altercations dropped to two.

Here in St. Louis, several malls have instituted curfews in just the past few months. The Galleria's went into effect on April 20 after a couple of fights broke out among young people last November and again in March. The Galleria's marketing manager, Jenny Koch, says the scuffles weren't the main impetus for the policy. The aim was to maintain a safe shopping experience.

Store officials here and elsewhere complain that swarms of teenagers do often make shopping seem as pleasant as a trip to the dentist. Youths dart annoyingly in and out of stores. They gather in loud clusters at the food court.

"There were so many kids around at night that no matter how many security guards and police there were, they couldn't keep them under control," says Ryan Clintsmans, store manager at Hannoush Jewelers in the Jamestown Mall, another area shopping center that has imposed a teen curfew, this one at 5 p.m. "There'd be fights, and the kids wouldn't spend any money. They'd just hang out."

Teens, of course, have hung out at malls since time immemorial. It's perhaps understandable: They can't go to nightclubs or other age-restricted spots. Moreover, their numbers have risen as transportation to and from malls has improved, parents have become more relaxed about letting their kids go, and the attractions – such as multiplex cinemas – have grown.

Erika Myles, for instance, always sees a knot of young people out in front of the cinemas at the Jamestown Mall on the weekend. "It sort of takes away from the shopping experience," says the sales associate at Express, a popular teen clothing store. "They use profane language and stuff like that. It can make people uncomfortable." She, in fact, thinks parents too often use the mall as a babysitter for their children.

Many shoppers also welcome the new curfews. "Obviously teenagers are becoming unruly, and parents aren't in control of their children anymore," says Melissa Dickinson, a St. Louis resident and Galleria shopper over the cutoff age. "[The policy] makes parents more responsible for their children while they're
Yet not all teens who hang out at malls are disruptive, and many of them, predictably, resent the new strictures. "It's dumb," says Jen, a 16-year-old high school student. She thinks kids will just look for other places to hang out and other, less wholesome ways to pass the weekend hours – including driving around aimlessly.

Jessica Harris, 19, who is quickly finishing up some shopping with her younger sister at the Galleria before the 3 p.m. cutoff time, sees other dangers: She suggests teens will be tempted to skip school on Fridays to beat the curfew. Then there are racial concerns. Jessica’s sister, Brena Harris, who is African-American, believes the policy could be discriminatory. Brena says she typically goes shopping with her sister or friends, while "white people usually go to the mall with their families."

Others think teens are being unfairly blamed. Jada Buckner, 13, saw two fights break out at the Galleria in recent months, both involving older teens who didn't fall under the curfew.

"I hate it," concurs Elaina Barnie, 13, carrying a Hollister shopping bag. "I don't think all kids should be punished for something others did."

And 16 as the cutoff age – it's too Draconian, says Laura Grauer, 22. She notes that people are almost ready to move away from home at that age: "If they're mature enough to live on their own, they should be mature enough to shop."

The move does represent a risk for malls. Teenagers don't just come to the mall to loiter in front of the Gap. They spend money. According to Teen Research Unlimited (TRU), a market research firm, they spent $179 billion in 2006. Rob Callender, TRU's trends director, says teens "value customer service: They feel a little put off if retailers are innately suspicious of them just because of their age group."

Analysts note that if a mall has a lot of teen-oriented stories, curfews could hurt sales. If the mall is more focused on consumers who frequent Chicos and Lane Bryant, it will probably help.

Tony Stephens, for one, says he's not worried about a drop in revenue. The vice president and general manager of the Jamestown Mall suggests sales might even increase since kids will shop with deeper-pocketed parents. Similarly, Ms. Koch of the Saint Louis Galleria says the feedback she's gotten from stores and customers so far has been "overwhelmingly positive."

And, unfortunately for teens looking for a clubhouse on Saturday night, that may be the ultimate test: Whether the curfews add to or subtract from the cash registers.
**Demonstrate Understanding**

1. What do towns like St. Louis hope to gain from having mall curfews for teens? Use examples from the text to support your answer.

2. In the article, a number of people are asked how they feel about teen curfew. Next to each group, write down a quote stating their opinion on the curfew issue.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Quote (opinion)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Kids</td>
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<td>Store workers</td>
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<td>Residents (Against the curfew)</td>
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<td>Residents (For the curfew)</td>
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<td>Teen Research Unlimited Director</td>
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Develop an Interpretation
3. “Teens of course have hung out at malls since time immemorial.” Choose two adult expectations mentioned in the article that you believe are unreasonable and explain why.

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<thead>
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<th>Expectations</th>
<th>Why unreasonable?</th>
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Develop an Interpretation
4. The author uses information from both teens and adults to support the curfew argument. Choose a side (curfew or no curfew) and explain why you think you are right. Use evidence from the article to support your answer.
**Analyze Text**

5. In the beginning of the article, the author uses descriptions like “dressed to kill” and “particularly dangerous-looking subject” to describe a teen named Liz. Why does the author use this description to begin the article?

**Analyze Text**

6. Journalists and other authors are supposed to present both sides equally. Is the author completely fair; or is she trying to promote a particular position? Give examples from the article to support your answer.