

The Gap Year

Ahh, the gap year. Alternatively known as a "year out", this is a time when people, typically out of high school, take a year or two to work and/or travel before taking the plunge into college, university, or the working world. This trend is a more common practice in Europe and Australia, but a growing number of North Americans are also taking time out to experience a different pace of life. According to the Lonely Planet's *The Gap Year Book*, "[a] gap year is welcomed by most universities. You'll be less likely to drop out and will be more mature, having had a chance to work and satisfy a bit of wanderlust".¹ You'll also be able to apply your newfound skills and knowledge into your coursework or job, giving it a fresh perspective.

Not only are young adults taking this opportunity, but also people in the midst of career changes also participate. For more information about the benefits of taking a gap year, visit the link to an article from Harvard University entitled "Time Out or Burn Out for the Next Generation": <http://adm-is.fas.harvard.edu/timeoff.htm>.²

¹ Lonely Planet's *The Gap Year Book*. 2003. Lonely Planet Pty Publications. p. 10-11.

² Griffith, S. *Taking a Gap Year*, 3rd edition. 2003. Oxford, UK. Vacation Work publishers.

This can be a year of watching television and playing video games at home, or it could be a time to gain both employment and life skills while exploring various parts of the world. Many people also use this time to travel and see sights they've only read or studied about. While all these are valid reasons for taking a "gap year", you will undoubtedly get a more valuable experience if you plan and research the available information before you make a final decision.

Sound appealing? Here are some print and online resources that are tailored specifically to help you make the most of your "gap year":



Lonely Planet's *The Gap Year Book*. 2003. Lonely Planet Pty Publications.

Once again, the knowledgeable and footloose people at Lonely Planet have made an indispensable guide that pulls all vital information into one source. Topics include who to go with, money

& costs, packing, health & safety, reverse culture shock, and types of work available. It also breaks up the world into regions, with all the essential information that has made Lonely Planet famous.

Griffith, Susan. *Taking a Gap Year*. 3rd edition. 2003. Oxford, UK. Vacation Work publishers.

Susan Griffith is a well-respected travel writer who does thorough research for her topics. She divides information sources into British and North American, which makes for easy reference. This resource also includes tax information, a directory of gap year programs, expeditions, various types of work available, courses, *au pair* work, Web site: www.vacationwork.co.uk

The Year Out Group

www.yearoutgroup.org

This is a comprehensive British web site that discusses all "year-out" possibilities by focusing on providing comprehensive information and promoting "well-structured year-out programmes" that span from a few weeks to a year.³

Book Reviews

Stealing Home Mantel, Paul



Little Brown and Company, 2004
Age Range 10 to 14
135 pages

Stealing Home is the story of a student exchange told from the home team's perspective. Joey's family is taking in a boy from Nicaragua for a whole year and fourteen year old Joey is very concerned about the potential negative impact this visitor will have on his life. Once Jesus arrives though, Joey finds things aren't all that bad, that is until Jesus upstages him as the star of the baseball team.

Stealing Home is an easy read, with a straightforward plot, predictable conflict and simple resolution. The central concepts of the book, adolescent lack of self-confidence and the need to be accepted by your peers are clearly defined and easy to follow. They are also universal which as demonstrated by both Joey and his Nicaraguan brother Jesus. Besides these two central characters, the secondary players are fairly standard and easy to identify. There's the school bully, the pretty girl, the goofy best friend and the super athlete. The story is told explicitly so that it develops logically and simply. Even the setting is kept generic to make it feel familiar to kids from almost any neighbourhood across North America.

Joey is an average fourteen-year-old boy struggling to fit in with friends at school and to make an impression on the baseball field. He fears that this new kid from Nicaragua will make him stick out from the crowd in all kinds of embarrassing ways. With Jesus' arrival, Joey begins to appreciate that a culture exchange of this kind has meaning both for the boy who is visiting as well as for the host family. He recognizes his own good fortune for the first time and he is happy to share with this newcomer.

³ Lonely Planet's *The Gap Year Book*. 2003. Lonely Planet Pty Publications. p. 221.