

Baby, I really thought it over

Sophomores learn responsibility of parenting

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On a bustling Thursday morning at St. Frances Academy, Baltimore, Shakiara Coleman anxiously approached her cousin in the hallway and asked her if she would watch her baby while she took a biology test. After her test, Shakiara went to lunch with friends and on to another class. When she finally realized that she needed to find her cousin and get her baby back, her cousin and the baby were nowhere to be found.

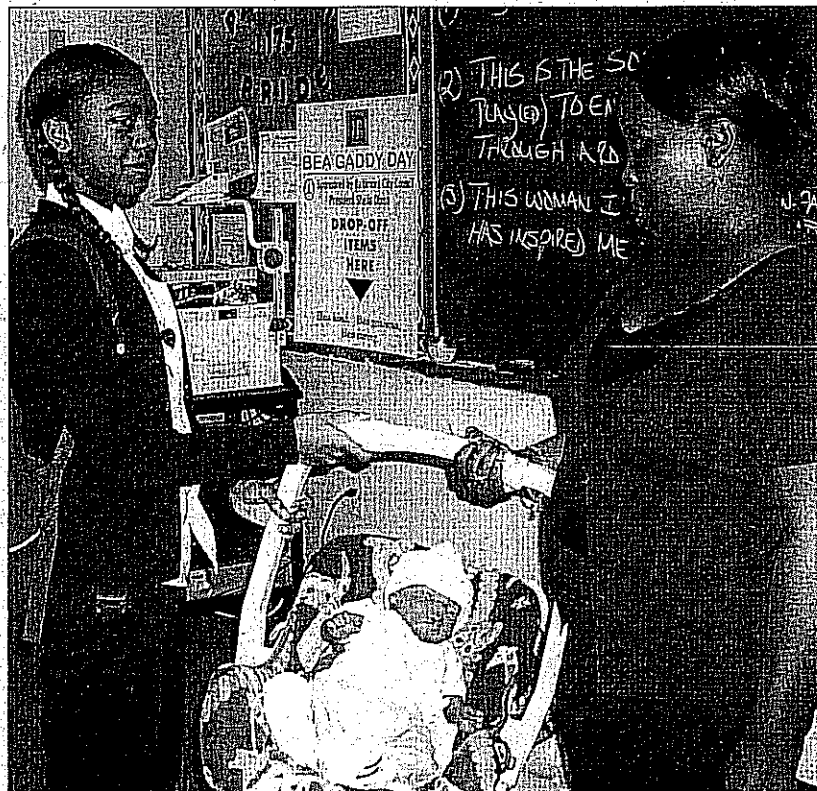
"If it had been a real baby I would have been more careful," Shakiara told her teacher, Angela Thorpe-Johnson, who had found the baby.

Shakiara is taking Mrs. Thorpe-Johnson's "sisters' right of passage" class, which consists of 20 female students. Mrs. Thorpe-Johnson contacted the archdiocesan division of youth and young adult ministry to inquire about the "Baby Think it Over" program, which incorporates dolls that simulate the behavior of newborn babies. The teacher borrowed four of their infant simulators to show her class how much responsibility and effort it takes to care for a baby.

"My goal is to prevent teen pregnancy," said Mrs. Thorpe-Johnson. "It's not to show them how great motherhood is."

Mrs. Thorpe-Johnson heard about the "Baby Think It Over" program from fellow teacher David Owens who did the baby experiment with his tennis team.

Each girl in the class will be given a lifelike, anatomically correct male or female baby to take care of for 48 hours, which sounded easy enough until the students heard the baby cry. The babies don't



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A tired and stressed Shakiara Coleman (left) gives her simulated infant back to her teacher, Mrs. Thorpe-Johnson.

need to be fed or diapered, but it is guaranteed the infant simulators will scream and cry about every two hours. A tamper resistant monitor in the baby will detect how well the baby is being taken care of or neglected.

To get the baby to stop crying and calm down, a small key, which is attached to the mother's wrist, must be inserted into the baby's back and held there. Once the key is nestled into the child's back it will take one to 30 minutes for it to stop crying.

"I want them to make sure they consciously understand that they do not want a baby until they are ready," said Mrs. Thorpe-Johnson. "A baby is a huge adjustment."

Mrs. Thorpe-Johnson feels that instead of just talking about abstinence and right

choices, this experience will allow them to relate to something more physical.

Before Shakiara left school on Wednesday afternoon with her bundle of joy, she commented that she didn't think this would be an easy project, and she was a little nervous because taking care of this baby is not like baby-sitting.

Her plan that afternoon was to take the bus, but instead she called her stepfather to come pick her up. She didn't want people to look at her strangely for carrying around a 21-inch, seven-pound vinyl baby. During her "Baby Think it Over" experience, Shakiara said she spent most of the time in the house except for a walk to her grandmother's house, where she had to explain to

inquiring passers-by that the baby wasn't real.

Shakiara said that the hardest part was getting out of bed to take care of her crying baby boy. She was up around one, three and six on Thursday and Friday morning for at least 20 minutes dealing with her cranky baby.

"I was tired and stressed," said Shakiara. "I learned never to have children. I don't like babies."

Shakiara said that she was so tired at school that she even fell asleep in two of her classes until the baby woke her up. She also said that she couldn't do what she wanted to and that made things difficult.

"It's natural for teens to be selfish," said Mrs. Thorpe-Johnson, "but if you have a baby you can't."