



Tips for Teachers

A Guide for Using *New Youth Connections*
in the Classroom

April 2001

This Issue's Main Theme: Fathers

Have your students read Matt Kamel's introduction to this issue's main theme: fathers in the lives of teens ("The Fathers in Our Lives," p. 2). Matt points out that he has divided feelings about his father: he's intimidated by him, but also knows his father loves him. The stories about fathers in this issue reflect similarly divided feelings. Have your students discuss their attitudes toward their own fathers (or toward the role of fathers in general) before reading the following stories.

Looking for Dad's Love

Naomi Hopkins, in "I Thought My Dad Didn't Like Me," p. 5, describes how she began to believe that her father was rejecting her when she saw him paying more attention to her sister. When Naomi shares her feelings with her father, they open up communication and become closer, as she sees how much they have in common.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Have you ever felt yourself growing distant from a family member? How did you react? Did you talk to the family member about how you felt, like Naomi did? Why or why not?

—Naomi finds out she had the wrong impression of her father's attitude toward her. Was there a time you realized you were wrong about the way someone thought about you? What created the wrong impression in the first place? How were you able to get through to the truth?

A Quick Way to Get Everyone Writing:

Letters to the Editor: Remind readers that we welcome letters to the editor and publish most of them. They may evolve out of some of the lessons below and can be quite brief.

—Naomi never knew she had much in common with her father until she started taking an active interest in the things he likes. Think of someone you feel distant from, whom you would like to have a better relationship with. What kinds of things might you have in common with this person? How could you begin to share these common interests?

Father on a Rampage

In "The Guy I Call My Dad," p.6, the writer is verbally abused and constantly threatened by his violent father, who is a control freak with a hair-trigger temper. The father beats the writer's mother, but the family pretends nothing is happening. The writer plans to move out as soon as he has a job.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—If you were in the writer's shoes, how would you handle living with your father?

—The writer deals with his difficult emotions by channeling them into something positive—he writes about the anger he feels so it doesn't completely overwhelm him. In what positive ways do you deal with difficult emotions?

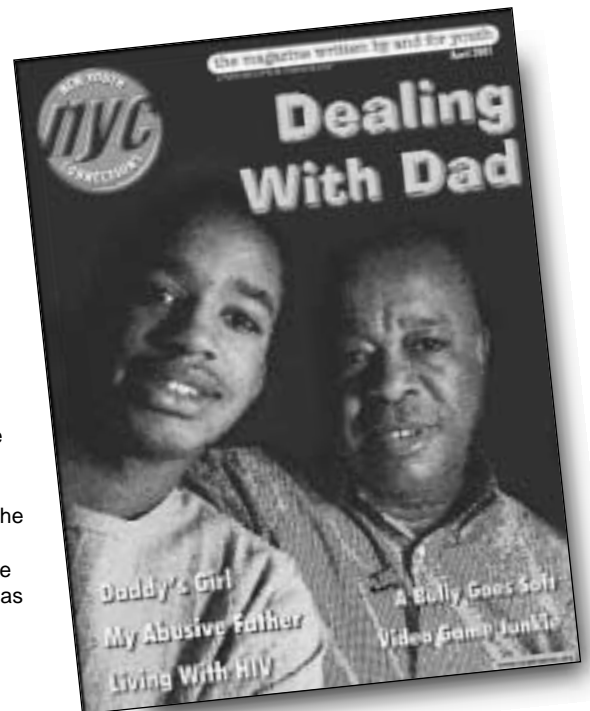
—Have you ever known someone who was in a situation similar to the writer's? How did the person handle it? What eventually happened?

Group Activity:

Students can work in pairs or small groups. They should come up with a list of suggestions on the following: aside from running away from home, what steps could the writer take to try to improve his family situation? Go around the room, list suggestions from each group on the board, and discuss.

Roleplay:

—Two students, playing the writer and his father. The writer wants his father to know how destructive his behavior is to the family. The father thinks he has the right to act however he wants.



A note on the lessons:

The following lessons are designed to promote reflection on the issues raised by the stories in NYC. Each story is summarized briefly, followed by prompts that can be used to initiate discussion and/or brief writing assignments. In addition, roleplays are suggested for more active learning.

A note on the role plays:

You will need two or three teens to act out the suggested role plays in front of class. Make sure the young people understand their roles by briefly reviewing the characters in the stories. Each role play participant has to try to convince the other of her point of view. Let the role play go on for about five minutes. Then have the class discuss what they've seen and relate it back to the themes in the story.

A Dad with HIV

In "My Dad Has HIV," p. 12, the writer describes how her father, who works in a hospital, contracted HIV by getting accidentally pricked with a needle. The writer deals with the trauma by confiding in friends. Still, it's too painful for her to even think of not having him in her life.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—At first, the writer wants to pretend her father doesn't have HIV. But then she confides in a friend and feels better. Who do you confide in when you're facing a tough time? What makes this person easy to confide in? How does telling your problems to others help you deal with them better? If you are not able to confide in others, why do you think that is?

—Even though she tells some friends about her father's condition, the writer still has to hide the news from most people. Have you ever known someone who was in a similar situation? Did the person ever reveal the whole truth? What happened when they did?

—The writer deals with her difficult feelings



by writing about them in a journal. What activities do you use to deal with difficult feelings? If you write in a journal, what is it about writing that helps?

From Bully to Nice Guy

In "Bad Boy Gets a Conscience," p. 3, the anonymous writer describes how he felt powerful and respected when he tormented and picked on other kids. When a girl he likes challenges his behavior, he begins to feel guilty about being mean and slowly becomes a more compassionate and giving person. In "I See Myself in Angel," p. 4, the same writer describes how he sees himself in the TV show "Angel," which is about a vampire trying to make up for horrible things he did in the past by helping people in need.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Why do you think the writer acted so mean toward people? What did he gain from being that way?

—The writer meets a teacher who he respects. How does the teacher treat the writer?

—What makes the writer change his behavior? In what ways is the writer different now than in the past?

—The writer used to feel good about himself by being mean to people. What makes him feel good about himself now?

—The writer feels guilty about the people he was mean to. How does he deal with those feelings of guilt?

—The writer says he can't change the past, but can only focus on the present. Does this attitude relate to your own life? In what ways?

—The writer sees himself in the TV show "Vampire." Think of a book, movie, song, or other art form that reflects your life. How do you see yourself in it? How has it helped you understand yourself better?

—Circle a passage in this story that you can really relate to. Why do you relate to this passage? What connection does it have to your own life?

—Write a short letter to the writer, telling him what you feel about the way he changed his life.

Roleplay:

—Two students, playing the writer and a friend. The writer's friend is a bully and doesn't want to change his ways because it makes him feel powerful. The writer wants him to know that there are better ways for him to feel good about himself.

Crossing a Boundary?

In "Go See 'Yo Mama' for Yourself," p. 10, Naomi Hopkins describes a controversial photography exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum,

which features a photo of a nude woman taking the place of Christ at the Last Supper. Mayor Giuliani has attacked the photo, saying it shouldn't be exhibited. When Naomi sees the photo, she wonders what all the fuss is about.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—What is your reaction to the photograph "Yo Mama's Last Supper"? Do you think it is offensive? Why or why not?

—Should an artist have complete freedom in her work? Or are their certain boundaries that shouldn't be crossed? What might those boundaries be?

—Think of a controversial artist (rapper, visual artist, writer) whose work you respect. What makes the artist's work controversial? Do you feel the artist's controversial reputation is justified? Why or why not?

Roleplay:

—Two students. One student thinks "Yo Mama's Last Supper" is offensive and should not be displayed, and that artists in general should be more careful about the messages they create in the work. The other student thinks the photograph is not offensive and that artists should have complete freedom in expressing their views.

Facing History—and Himself

In "Stereotypes and Consequences," p. 11, Roderick Scarlett visits two exhibits that make him question his values. An exhibit on the civil rights movement gives him empathy for the heroes of the movement and respect for the skills they used to face down danger. A second exhibit makes him think about his willingness to aid those less fortunate than himself.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Roderick questions his values after viewing two exhibitions. Think of a singer, rapper, writer, or other artist whose work made you question or change your values. Who was the artist? What was it about her work that made you question your views? How did your views change?

—Roderick admires the heroes of the civil rights movement, who risked their lives to win equality for Blacks. Who are your political heroes? Why is this person important to you? If you don't have political heroes, why do you think that is so?

—Roderick admits that he's been reluctant in the past to aid people less fortunate than himself, like the homeless or people in need of help. Was there a time you didn't come to the aid of a person who needed help? Why didn't you go to the person's aid? Would you do it over differently, if you had the chance? Why/why not?

Video Game Fanatic

In "Addicted!: I Was a Video Game Junkie," p. 14, Rasheeda Raji becomes addicted to video games by age 6. She enjoys beating guys, who expect her to lose, and becomes so obsessed with winning that she loves defeating kids half her age. She gradually realizes how unhealthy her behavior is and develops other interests.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Why do you think Rasheeda becomes so addicted to video games and obsessed with winning?

—Have you ever had a similar addiction? How did you give it up? If you haven't given it up, what steps might you take to try to give it up?

—Rasheeda realizes she has a problem when she has to beat someone half her age. Have you had a similar experience, where something made you realize you were too obsessed with something? What happened and how did you change as a result?

Roleplay:

—Two students, playing Rasheeda and her friend. The friend is obsessed with playing video games and thinks there's nothing wrong with this. Rasheeda wants her friend to know the obsession might not be healthy, and offers her tips on how to find other interests.



have this problem? What are you doing to get over it?

—Think of a habit you have that you would like to change. List steps you could take to try to break this habit.

Overcoming a Negative Self-Image

In "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall" (p. 18), Ijeoma Okolo writes about how she became obsessed with her appearance at age 13, to the point where she felt ugly and began to hate herself. She tried to lighten her skin, became bulimic, and suffered from depression. Then she meets an adult who challenges her traditional notions of beauty, and Ijeoma slowly begins to gain in self-esteem.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Why do you think Ijeoma felt ugly? What kinds of messages did she get about beauty that may have led to her negative self-image? What other experiences did she have that caused her to think that way?

—Ijeoma encounters an adult who helps change the way she views herself. Have you had a similar experience with a teen or an adult? Who was the person, and what impact did he/she have on you?

—Ijeoma writes, "To be beautiful is one thing but to feel beautiful is another." What does she mean by that? Why is it harder to feel beautiful than to be beautiful?

Role play:

Ijeoma and a friend. The friend thinks she's ugly and that no one could ever like her. Ijeoma wants her to realize that it is possible for her to feel good about herself.

Trying to Fit In

In "I Wanted to Be Pretty and Popular," p. 18, Sabrina Rencher writes about how she changed her looks and behavior to fit in with the popular kids at her school. Growing up in

Procrastination Problems

In "I'll Do It Later" Vicky Zajac writes about her bad habit of procrastinating. She's late for concerts, school, and important meetings. She realizes her habit is out of control and is taking small steps to be on time.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Why does Vicky procrastinate?
—What happened when Vicky planned to meet the math teacher for tutoring?

—What steps is Vicky taking to be on time?

—Do you have a problem with procrastinating or being on time? Why do you think you

Writing contest, p. 2:

Encourage students to enter our writing contest, which offers \$175 in prizes:

"If You Could Rid Yourself of Any Emotion, What Would It Be and Why?"

You may want to devote part of your class to discussing the topic, before turning to the writing (during discussion, students do not have to reveal the content of what they plan to write about, which may be too personal, but can instead talk about how emotions affect teens in general).





Haiti, she didn't feel the pressure to have the perfect look, but it's a different story in the U.S. Eventually she realizes that she doesn't want to change herself to fit in, and becomes popular by being herself.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- How did Sabrina's attitude toward her looks change when she came to the U.S. from Haiti?
- After watching the TV show about girls who lose weight to fit in, how does Sabrina change her attitude toward being popular?
- Have you faced similar pressures to fit in? How did you handle them? Did you try to be like others, or did you stay true to yourself? How do you feel about the decision you made?
- How much are you influenced by the way other people dress and act? Do you enjoy trying to fit in with the crowd, or do you wish you could be more your own person? Why?
- Sabrina realizes she's more comfortable being herself than putting on an act. How hard is it for you to be yourself? What do you think you could do to be more comfortable with who you are?

Roleplay:

—Two teens, playing Sabrina and a friend. Sabrina's friend thinks she has to dress and act a certain way to be popular. Sabrina wants her friend to know that she can be herself and still be popular.

Free Music or Stealing?

In "Killing Napster for No Reason," p. 21, Vicky Zajac explores the Napster controversy. She's angry that she probably won't be able to download free music, and thinks artists are hypocrites for preventing it. Few of your students may have downloaded music, but most have probably heard about it.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Like Vicky, many people think that anyone should have the right to download copyrighted music from the Internet without paying for it. For the person who gets free music, this may be great. But what about the artist?
- If you download music, are you "sharing" music or stealing it?
- Whose rights are more important: those

of listeners to share and hear what they want? Or those of artists to control how their material is used? Why?

—If you were a recording artist, would you want your music to be downloaded for free or would you oppose it? Defend your position.

The Pain of Pregnancy

In "My Pregnancy Was Nothing But Problems," p. 23, Lillian Cremedy writes about her complication-filled pregnancy and painful childbirth. Her teen body wasn't ready to carry a child, and it didn't help that she was locked out from her foster home during her pregnancy.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Have the group read the story. Ask them if it has changed their views of pregnancy and birth. If so, how? If not, why not?
- Would reading stories like this discourage teens from having children before they're ready? Why/why not?

Party Time

In "Electronic High," p. 28, Michael Temprow writes about how he becomes drawn into the world of electronic music and rave parties. He does drugs and dances like a maniac, but soon comes to realize he can enjoy the scene without being high. He also masters the difficult art of 'spinning', which gives him a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Eventually Michael realizes he doesn't have to do drugs to enjoy the rave scene. What is your reaction to that?
- Without drugs, Michael enjoys the "natural high" of the rave scene. In what ways do you feel a "natural high." What is it about the activity that makes you feel good?
- Michael feels a lot of pride when he masters the difficult art of 'spinning.' What hobby or activity do you turn to for a sense of pride and accomplishment?



Tips for Teachers is written for the bulk subscribers to *New Youth Connections* to help them use the magazine more effectively with teens in their classes and programs.

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