



# Tips for Teachers

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

April 2002

**Writing Contest—  
\$175 in Prizes**

**“Is It More Important To  
Make a Lot of Money,  
Or Love What You Do.  
How Does That  
Influence Your Plans  
After High School.”**

Writing Contest, p. 2: Encourage your students to enter this month's Writing Contest, which offers \$175 in prizes: “Is It More Important to Make a Lot of Money or Love What You Do? How Does That Influence Your Plans After High School?” You may want to devote part of your class to discussing this topic before turning to the writing.

**Deadline: May 6**

## **THIS ISSUE'S THEME: IMMIGRATION**

In this issue of *NYC*, several writers examine their complex and often conflicted experiences as immigrant youth. They describe coming to the United States from countries as varied as China, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Yemen, their expectations, prior to arriving in America, and how those expectations have often clashed with reality. They discuss what they miss about their native cultures, what they like about life here and the complicated paths they've taken on the way to becoming American.

**Warm-Up Exercise:** Have your students locate China, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Yemen on a world map or globe, prior to reading the stories.

### **A Difficult Adjustment**

In “Dreams of America... Memories of China,” p. 3, Chun Lar Tom describes how her great excitement on leaving a small town in China for the United States faded into disap-



pointment and loneliness once she arrived here. But after three difficult years, she has adjusted to her new culture and has accomplished many things.

### **Prompts for discussion and/or writing:**

—Chun Lar is very excited when she learns she'll be leaving China for the U.S. What was your first reaction when you learned you'd be coming to this country?

—Chun Lar expects everyone in the U.S. to have red hair and green eyes, and for the buildings to be as high as the clouds. What did you imagine the U.S. to be like before you arrived here? How was the reality of the U.S. different from what you expected? How was it the same?

—Chun Lar is miserable at first in the U.S. because she can't speak English and misses her country. What were your first months like in the U.S.? What did you like most about it? What did you dislike most about it?

—After three years, Chun Lar says she has adjusted to this country. Can you say the same thing? Why or why not?

### **A note on the lessons**

The following lessons are designed to promote reflection on 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, role plays and group exercises are sometimes suggested for more active learning experiences.

### **A note on the roleplays**

You will need two or three teens to act out the suggested roleplays in front of class. Make sure the young people understand their roles by briefly reviewing the characters in the stories. Each participant has to try to convince the other of her point of view as described in the roleplay. Let the roleplay 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 note on the group exercises**

A note on the group exercises: These activities are designed to have students work together in pairs or small groups. They can then share their work with the larger group in a general discussion.

Tips for Teachers is also available on our web site at:  
**[www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org)**

## Journey From Yemen

In "Joining My Father in America," p. 4, Sara Said comes to the U.S. at age 10 from Yemen. She misses her country and feels lonely in school, but slowly learns English and begins to enjoy herself. Her relationship with her father, though, is no longer as close as it once was.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Sara is confused when she sees teens who are wearing ripped clothes, mistaking them for poor people. Think back to when you first arrived in the U.S. What was the first thing that confused you? Why did it confuse you, and how do you feel about it now, looking back.

—In Yemen it was sunny all the time, but New York in January is cold and windy. How was the weather in the U.S. different from the weather in your old country? How hard was it to adjust to the weather?

—Sara misses going to her garden in Yemen and climbing trees and picking fruit. What do you most miss about your country?

—One reason Sara feels lonely in school in the U.S. is that many of her classmates are Christian, and she's a Muslim. She never knew a Christian back in Yemen. What made you feel different from your classmates when you arrived in the U.S.? Did anything make school easier for you, over time? What was it?

—Sara finds English to be a difficult language to learn. What did you find most difficult about learning English?

—Partly because her father has to work long hours here, Sara no longer feels as close to him. Did coming to the U.S. change your relationship with any of your family members, either for better or worse? What made the relationship change?

—Sara considers herself a Muslim first, and an Arab-American second. How do you define your identity?

## Leaving Great-Grandma

In "My Abuelita," p. 8, Jenny Roman has a very close relationship with her great-grandmother in Peru. She is able to share experiences with her that she can't with other adults. Jenny is living in the U.S. when her great-grandmother passes away, and she continues to remember the good times they shared.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Jenny's great-grandmother had a big impact on her life. Write about a relative or friend who's had a big impact on your life. What



Karolina Zaniesienko

was it about the person that made such an impact on you?

—Jenny doesn't feel comfortable with most adults, but feels comfortable with her great-grandmother because she just listens and doesn't ask too many questions. Why do you think Jenny likes that about her great-grandmother? What qualities do you look for in adults to be able to trust them?

—Jenny remembers the funny times she shared with her great-grandmother and not the painful times when her great-grandmother forgot her. How do you preserve the memory of a loved one who's passed away?

## Missing A Sense Of Community

Christian Galindo, in "A Tale of Two Cities," p. 9, comes to the U.S. from Colombia when he's 11. He appreciates the opportunities he has here, but misses the warmth and sense of community of his native country.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Christian remembers the lovely houses and parks of his old neighborhood in Colombia, where people played soccer and held celebrations. Write about a favorite neighborhood or place where you once lived.

—In the U.S. Christian doesn't feel the same sense of friendship and unity with people that he felt in Colombia: "I think it's nearly impossible for me to feel that in New York City because

there are so many different perspectives that I find hard to identify with... Here, most people I've met seem to care only about themselves and their immediate family." Do you agree with Christian, that it's hard for New Yorkers to feel close to one another because they come from many different nationalities and cultures? Why or why not?

—Do you know your neighbors? How close do you feel to the people in your neighborhood?

—Christian says that New York has given him many opportunities, such as a free education and getting to know people from different cultures. What opportunities has living in New York given you?

## Which Country Is Mine?

Anghela Calvo in "Torn Between Two Countries," p. 12, comes to the U.S. when she's 9 and has a very hard time, especially in school, where she's teased. On a visit back to Bolivia a year later, she decides to stay there with the relatives who largely raised her. She returns to the U.S. at 15, ready to try New York again.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Anghela thinks she had "a beautiful childhood" growing up in Bolivia. Would you describe your childhood in your native land as beautiful? Why or why not?

—One of the things she has a hard time getting used to in this country is the food. For example, she was used to spicy food in Bolivia. What did you have a hard time getting used to



Cezary Ladocha

## A Quick Way to Get Everyone Writing Letters to the Editor:

We welcome letters to the editor and publish most of them (see p. 22). This is an easy way to involve everyone in a short writing assignment (and they will get the satisfaction of seeing their names in print). Writing letters can be an ideal “Do Now” exercise after your students finish reading articles in *NYC*. Use these prompts to get your students started (a few sentences on one or more of these points will be sufficient for a letter):

“I liked/disliked the article because...”

“A point I really agree with in the article, based on my experience, is...”

“A point I really disagree with, based on my experience, is...”

“A solution to one of the problems in this article might be...”

in this country? How, for example, is the food different from what you ate in your old country?

—Anghela has a hard time dealing with her classmates in school. They tease her and make fun of the way she dresses. What was your experience like with your classmates in the U.S.?

—Anghela feels torn between Bolivia and the U.S. Do you feel torn between two countries? Why or why not?

## Repercussions of 9/11

On p. 15, Sara Said, in “Walking While Arab,” writes about how, as a Muslim teen, she becomes an object of attention after 9/11 and gets harassed on the street.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Sara feels hated for being a Muslim. Have you ever felt like the object of negative attention because of your appearance, race or ethnicity? Why did you feel this way? Do you still have these feelings?

—Sara feels stereotyped as a terrorist because she comes from an Arab country. In what ways do you feel stereotyped because of your race or ethnicity?

—Some of Sara’s Muslim friends have a hard time deciding whether or not to wear their traditional dress in public, for fear of being harassed or threatened. Have you ever thought of changing the way you dress, for fear of being misunderstood or harassed in public? How?

—Sara says that education is the enemy of discrimination. What does she mean by this? Do you agree or disagree?

**Roleplay:** two students, playing Sara and a Muslim friend. The friend wants to change her traditional clothing because she’s afraid of how people will react to her in public. Sara wants to convince her friend to dress as she always does.

**Group activity:** students can work in pairs or small groups. The groups have to come up with a school program to prevent and lessen stereotypes about Muslims and Arabs. Have the groups share and compare their ideas in a general discussion with the class.

## A Tale of Two Cultures

And on p. 16, Anghela Calvo in “Learning to Love My Bolivian Culture” writes about how most teens in her native country of Bolivia listen to music from Europe and the U.S., shunning traditional Bolivian folk music. But when she moves to a more rural part of Bolivia, she learns to love her country’s traditional music and dance.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Were teens in your native country more interested in music from other countries? Why or why not?

—Did you ever, like Anghela, at first dislike a certain kind of music, but then change your mind? Why did you dislike the music and why did you change your mind?

—Anghela was once ashamed of Bolivian music, but now is proud of how beautiful and rich it is, and of her country in general. Were you ever ashamed of some part of your culture or heritage? Did you change your point of view? Why or why not?



Gary Smith

## OTHER STORIES

### Stressed by Chess

In “Consumed by Chess,” p. 20, Fabio Botarelli begins playing chess at age 8 and quickly becomes obsessed with the game. He competes in tournaments and gains great confidence as a player, but he is also a sore loser, holds grudges and is too intensely competitive. Fabio still plays chess, but has gotten better control of his emotions.



### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—When Fabio loses at chess he feels humiliated, and when he wins he almost can’t control his excitement. Is this a healthy way for anyone to react to victory and defeat? Or is there a better way to handle your emotions?

—Fabio is very competitive and gets into personal rivalries with opposing players. He wants to destroy his opponents and holds grudges when he loses. Do you think these qualities help or hinder his ability to play chess well? Why?

—Think of a sport you play. Which is more important for you: to win at the game, or the pleasure of playing? Why?

—Fabio says he wanted to win at chess to “gain honor, respect, loyalty and friendship.” Was he realistic in thinking that winning at chess could gain him these things? Why or why not?

—Fabio eventually realizes that his attitude towards chess needs improvement; he understands that he’s too power hungry and obsessed with winning. Did you ever find yourself getting too caught up in competitive feelings (either when playing a sport, or in school or with your peers in general)? Did you change your attitude? Why or why not?

### Losing Mom to AIDS

Gloria Williams, in “A Scar On My Heart,” p. 30, is just 6 or 7 years old when she finds out her mother has HIV. Nine years pass before her mother dies from AIDS, and during that time Gloria experiences a wide range of emotions: denial, fear, anger and acceptance. Although she has healed in some ways, she still licks her wounds.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—The first time Gloria visits her mother in the hospital, she says she felt “sweet and sour that day.” What does she mean by this?

—Gloria says she never fully accepted that her mother was going to die. How does the writer explain why she felt that way? Why does the writer say she had a “short term memory”?

—When Gloria’s mother dies, she says “all those years of coping crashed into reality.” What does the writer mean by this? How did she react when reality came crashing down?

—Gloria says, in order to be happy after her mother’s death, that she looks away “from some part of reality that I know is there.” What part of reality does she look away from? Is it healthy for the writer to do this? Why or why not?

—Gloria says she goes through a cycle of “breaking down and then dealing with it” after her mother’s death. What feelings did you go through after the death of a friend or family member? Were there particular “stages” to your grief or a “cycle” you were aware of? What were they? What emotion stands out the most? How have your feelings changed over time?

## Not Afraid to Speak Up

In “Silenced,” p. 18, Ashley Amey describes how she had a big mouth as a child, challenging the viewpoints of her parents and teachers. Her outspoken nature led to frequent punishments from her mother, but over the years Ashley has come to better understand where her mother’s coming from (and vice versa).

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Ashley’s mother and father were brought



John Gaston

up strictly and were not allowed to voice their opinions. They, in turn, bring up Ashley the same way. From your knowledge, how were your mother and father brought up? How does their upbringing influence the way they are raising you?

—Ashley gets the belt from her mother or grandmother when they think she’s out of line. Do you think parents should hit or beat children as punishment? If so, why? If not, what methods of punishment would be better and why?

—Why does Ashley’s father want her to be outspoken? Do you think women have to be outspoken so they won’t be seen as weaker than men? Why or why not?

—Why does Ashley’s mother want her to be less outspoken? How does she fear her daughter will be judged? Do you think the mother’s fear is valid? Why or why not?

## School Woes

In “Falling Behind in School,” p. 10, Nurys Benzant writes about how she falls behind in school and is now 17 and still a sophomore. She’s now working hard to catch up and will graduate as soon as she can.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—One reason Nurys didn’t do well in school is that she didn’t get much support at home. She says she felt her mother expected her to get bad grades. How is support at home related to doing well in school? Do you feel you’ve gotten that support? Why or why not?

—Nurys began to feel that nothing she was taught in school would help her in the future. Did you ever feel that way? Why? Did you ever change your mind? Why or why not?

—Nurys says that classes in the Dominican Republic are harder than classes in the U.S. Did you ever go to school in another country? How would you compare school there to school in the U.S.?

—Nurys is now committed to getting an education because she wants to have a nice car and a house, and wants to send her kids to college. Why do you want to get an education?



Cezary Ladocha

What motivates you to do well in school?

## A Love for the Game

Finally, in “Hoop Dreams,” p. 6, Bernie Mason describes his love of basketball and his greatest moments on the hardwood. Although he didn’t make his school’s varsity team, he hopes to play in college.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—What’s your favorite sport and why do you like to play it?

—Although he doesn’t make his school’s varsity team, Bernie gets over his disappointment and is determined to keep playing. Would you have been able to handle this setback as well as he did? Why or why not?

—Do you prefer team sports or individual sports? Why?



**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.

For more information, contact:

**Youth Communication**  
224 W. 29th St., 2nd fl.,  
New York, NY 10001  
212-279-0708 ext.100

[www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org)