



Tips for Teachers

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

April 2003

Writing Contest— \$175 in Prizes

Writing Contest, p. 2: Encourage your students to enter this month's Writing Contest, which offers \$175 in prizes. The topic is:

“What's Something You Hide From People That You Secretly Want Them to Know Explain.”

You may want to devote part of your class to discussing this topic, before turning to the writing.

Deadline: May 5

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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Write a Letter [5 Paragraph Essay] About the War

We find that teens have very mixed reactions to the war (emotionally, politically, and otherwise). Some are afraid and sad. Others are unconcerned. Some think it is a huge mistake. Others strongly support the President. And many teens have strongly mixed feelings. We're also finding that no matter how much (or little) they talk about the war, teens welcome the opportunity to reflect on their feelings in a safe, non-judgmental setting.

An excellent way to get teens to explore their views and feelings on the conflict is to ask them to write a letter about it, while letting them choose the recipient and what they wish to say. They can write to the President, to a relative in the armed forces, to Saddam Hussein, to a friend, a parent, or even themselves.

Warm ups: Give the class 5-7 minutes and ask each student to read two or three of the letters on pages 14-15. Then ask for volunteers to read aloud a letter or portion of a letter they especially liked. This will get the class thinking about what and to whom they want to write, and give them some information.

Read the following prompts (or write them on the board, or type them on a worksheet). Give the students only a minute, or two minutes tops, to freewrite a response to each one:

—A concern I have about the war is...

—One thing I would like to tell President

Bush is...

—One thing I'd like to tell our soldiers is...

—One thing I'd like to tell an Iraqi teenager is...

You can do both of the above mini lessons in about 20 minutes, and they provide the teens with the facts, emotions, and background they need to write a good letter themselves.

In addition to being a good opportunity for the teens to reflect, it is a good opportunity for



you to teach a few basic writing techniques. If you set out some ground rules you'll get better writing in this exercise, and it will help teens develop the skills they need to pass writing tests and do real-world writing assignments. Here are some suggestions. Depending on your class, consider the following:

1) Tell students they must block out their letter in standard format.

2) Tell students to use a beginning/middle/end structure, such as a five paragraph essay, where they introduce their idea in the first paragraph, support it in the next three, and make a concluding statement in the last paragraph. Note that except for the most casual letters, this is an excellent real world application of a skill they are learning in school; the five paragraph essay is a great tool for conveying an idea.

Other stories related to the war and the Middle East in this issue:

Speakout (p. 16). Twenty teens express a diverse range of views on the war.

Fleeing Iraq (p. 17). This story, by a Kurdish teen who wrote for NYC several years ago, may help students to understand both repression in Iraq under Saddam Hussein and the expense of living in a war.

So Hard to Say Goodbye (p. 9). A Yemeni immigrant writes sweetly about her joy at coming to America and being reunited with her father, and her sadness at losing her friends in Yemen.

3) If you have time, ask each student to exchange their letter with a neighbor. The neighbor should tell them one thing they like about the letter, one thing that is unclear, and one thing they would like the writer to add. (They should tell them this in writing in the margin of the letter, and should sign their suggestions.)

Have students rewrite their letters right then, or for homework, based on the peer feedback. Students should hand in both the first draft and the rewrite. Tell them they will be graded on the quality of the comments they give to their peers and how well they integrate the suggestions of their peer, as well as on the overall quality of their letter.

Reading Treasure Hunt and Presentation

Goals of this lesson—Students will:

- Do a close reading of a story.
- Take accurate notes.
- Work cooperatively.
- Take individual responsibility.
- Make an oral presentation.
- Learn the distinction between “facts” and “anecdotes”
- Become more familiar with the homelessness problem in New York City.

Materials: paper, pencil

Divide your class into teams of 5-7 students each. Each team will read either “When Homelessness Hits Home” (p. 3) or “She’s Homeless” (p. 5). (Note: Two teams can read the same article.)

Instructions for the teams: The teams have 20 minutes (approx.) to read their article. They should read it aloud in their group.

The teams reading “When Homelessness Hits Home” must discover at least 16 facts about homelessness and record them. Each team member must individually record at least two facts.

The teams reading “She’s Homeless” must discover at least 16 facts *or* anecdotes about homelessness. Again, each team member must individually record at least two anecdotes or facts.

When the teams are done, they will present their findings orally, reading from the facts and anecdotes they have recorded. They’ll go round-robin, each person presenting a fact, going around until all the facts are presented. In addition, at the end of their presentation, one representative from each team must make a brief summary statement about their presentation (e.g., “Homelessness is getting worse and the city isn’t doing enough,” or “It’s really unpleasant living in a homeless shelter.”)

Preparing the teams: Tell the class that when you are writing about a topic, two ways to convey information about it are *facts* (such as statistics) and *anecdotes* (tiny stories or examples). Government reports, for example, tend to be heavy on facts. Magazine articles tend to be heavy on anecdotes. A mix of both types of information often make for an interesting essay.

In this issue of NYC, the story “When Homelessness Hits Home” is built primarily around facts, while “She’s Homeless” is built primarily around anecdotes. Students are going to look closely at those building blocks in the story by doing this treasure hunt for facts and anecdotes.

Give students on each team an example (from the list in the box) of what they’re looking for.

Each team member must write down at least two facts or anecdotes. (You may have to coach the team a bit to help them identify relevant information. Note that practically every paragraph has something they can use.)

Teams compete to make the best presentation. Instructor determines winner based on number of facts, quality of presentation, summary statement.

While students are reading, circulate around the room to insure that students know what they are looking for, and are actually recording their facts and anecdotes individually. There should also be some discussion of whether a particular item is a fact or an anecdote. You can help them out.

With about 3 minutes to go, remind the teams that they need to write a summary statement and choose one person to deliver it, as well as report their facts and anecdotes.

Then, each team makes their presentation.

Teams are judged on how well they present facts on homelessness and anecdotes on homelessness, and on their summary statement.

Discussion (time permitting)

Facts and Anecdotes: Ask students which is the most important or interesting fact they learned about homelessness while reading the story. Then ask students what is the most memorable anecdote from the stories. (There will be a range of opinion on this, which is fine; you’re simply trying to get the students to notice them.)

Content: What should the city do to help homeless people? What would work? What wouldn’t? What’s the city’s obligation? What can be expected from people seeking shelter? Whose fault is homelessness?

Form: Compare and contrast the “facts” vs. “anecdotes” presentation of homelessness. Which do students prefer? Why? Which would be more important for a government official in charge of homelessness to know? Which would be the better basis for a short video on homelessness? Why?

The team reading, “When Homelessness Hits Home” must describe the homeless problem by presenting at least 16 facts from the story. Facts they can select include:

1. Domestic violence is a cause of homelessness.
2. Many teens live in shelters with their parents.
3. 18-25 year olds with young children make up almost half of the city’s homeless population.
4. Young people who grow up in foster care are especially at-risk of becoming homeless.
5. 3 in 10 homeless adults were once in foster care.
6. The number of homeless families in New York has grown from 2,000 in 1983 to 9,000 today.
7. More families are coming into the system, they are staying longer, and fewer are leaving.
8. Many people lost jobs after 9/11 and couldn’t pay rent.
9. Apartments have been getting more and more expensive in New York City.
10. The city gives landlords \$1,000 for

each homeless person who moves into an apartment, and \$5,300 for a family of five.

11. Some landlords won't accept small families because they want the extra money.

12. It's hard to get a Section 8 housing voucher because they're handled by five different city agencies.

13. You practically have to be homeless to get Section 8, which may drive people into shelters.

14. Some shelters provide counseling and other important services, which may make them attractive to people.

15. There are domestic violence programs in shelters.

16. Shelter rules are strict. You can be evicted for having an unclean room for three inspections.

The team reading "She's Homeless" must find at least 16 facts or anecdotes that describe Princess's life and what it's like to live in a shelter.

1. Princess lived in lots of youth shelters when she was younger. Now she's 22.

2. She lives in the Brooklyn Women's Shelter.

3. She's been living the life of a drifter, feels like a ghost.

4. Shelter rules: sign in for a bed at 9:30; lights-out at 11. No smoking. Can't bring in food after 6:30 p.m.

5. Shelter looks like an old grade school; big dorms sleeping 5-20 women.

6. Low walls around most of the beds. You can see over them if you stand up.

7. At night, if Princess hugs her teddy bears and closes her eyes, she can almost make believe she's somewhere else.

8. Princess thinks some of the women are crazy.

9. Many of the women don't take care of their personal hygiene; they're smelly and unkempt.

10. At first, Princess thought Violet didn't want help to get off drugs, but she's not sure now.

11. Princess met an old friend, Jade, in the shelter, who she had met earlier at a youth shelter.

12. Jade has a four-year-old, who she lost to foster care.

13. One woman hides (hoards) food up her sleeve.

14. Princess thinks the women should have more self-respect.

15. Princess hates living in the shelter. She wishes she could live somewhere else, but doesn't have anywhere else to go.

16. To Princess, a home is a place where you feel safe and have privacy.

17. Princess is moving into her own apartment soon.

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Practice Lesson for Regents Exam Listening Section

Use story: "When Homelessness Hits Home" on p. 9 (use story from the beginning to the section called "Many Agencies to Deal With." Do not read the story beyond the section entitled "A Safe Haven.")

What the teacher needs to know to use this lesson The Regents English exam has a listening section. A proctor reads the students an **Overview** (see below) and **The Situation** (see below). The proctor then reads a passage to the students, twice, during which time the students can take notes. The students then answer some multiple choice questions and write a report based on the Situation.

Step One: Read the Overview and the Situations

(Note: During the real test the students have a printed version of the Overview and the Situation in front of them as the proctor reads the story. If you can't make copies of the overview, consider writing the overview on the board, or just read it to them.)

Read this to your students:

Overview: You will listen to an article written by a teenager about how New York City's homelessness problem and how it relates to teens. You will then answer some multiple choice questions and write a report on the situation described below. You will hear the article twice. You may take notes.

The Situation: You are examining New York City's homelessness situation. You must write a position paper with recommendations on solving the problem. Listen to this story and then use information from the story to write your position paper.

Step Two: Tell your students, "Now I will read the passage aloud to you for the first time."

Read the story—Special Note for this Story: Do not read past the sentence which ends "...if they were out on their own" in the third column.

After reading the story once, say:

"You make take a few minutes to look over The Situation and your notes. (Pause) Now I will read the story again.

Step Three: Multiple Choice Questions and Report

After reading the article for the second time give them the questions on the next page. The next page also contains guidelines for writing the report. (Photocopy them at your school.)

Here are the answers to the multiple choice questions:

1) c 2) a 3) c 4) d 5) b 6) b 7) a

When Homelessness Hits Home

Multiple Choice Questions

NOTE TO TEACHER: After your students complete these questions you might want to point out to them that many questions are tricky. The test makers include answers that are possibly true in general but that are not mentioned in the reading passage. Questions 5 and 6 below are good examples. Question 5 lists four possibly correct answers to the question but only one of them is mentioned by the writer. The same thing applies to question 6 except for answer d. Tell your students that they cannot rely on their general knowledge or common sense when answering the questions. They must pick answers provided by the writer.

Directions: Use your notes to answer the questions about the story read to you.

1) What does the teenager Laquana say her shelter was like?

- a) a hotel
- b) the army
- c) a prison
- d) a nightmare

2) According to the writer which strategy did the city not try to reduce homelessness?

- a) build apartments for the homeless
- b) increase the number of shelter beds
- c) spend more money on the problem
- d) give homeless families money to pay rent

3) What fact does the writer think is surprising?

- a) the city's high rents
- b) families are staying longer in shelters
- c) the number of people under 25 who are homeless
- d) the connection between homeless and the events of 9/11

4) How long does a family stay in a shelter on the average?

- a) almost 6 months
- b) about 6 weeks
- c) almost 2 months
- d) nearly a year

5) What is one reason why there has been an increase in the number of homeless people?

- a) cuts and changes in the welfare system
- b) there are fewer jobs in the city
- c) more immigrants moving into the city
- d) families are getting too big

6) According to the writer what is one reason a family might want to be homeless?

- a) they get more money from the city
- b) some shelters provide services to homeless people
- c) their apartments are unlivable
- d) they want to move out of the city

7) When the police came to Laquana's apartment what did they tell her mother to do?

- a) call a domestic violence program
- b) go to a shelter
- c) have her boyfriend arrested
- d) come to the precinct station

NOTE: Below are the written instructions which accompany the test about writing the report. You may want to hand these out or write them on the board.

Writing the Report

Your task: Write a paper for your classmates about the problem of homelessness in New York City. Use specific and relevant information from the article you heard.

Here are the guidelines given on the actual Regents exam:

- Tell your audience what they need to know about the causes of homelessness and some possible solutions
- Use specific, accurate, and relevant information from the article to support your discussion.
- Use a tone and level of language appropriate for the high school sophomores who will read your paper.
- Organize your ideas in a logical and coherent manner.
- Indicate any words taken directly from the article by using quotation marks or referring to the writer.
- Follow the conventions of standard written English.