



# Tips for Teachers

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

April 2005

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A letter to the editor is a great “do now” writing exercise. It requires the student to *read* the story and *write* something thoughtful in response. It’s also good practice for the writing sections of the Regents, the SAT, and the GED tests, where students are given a short reading selection or prompt and required to write a cogent response in a short period of time.

For students who complain that this is an artificial writing exercise, explain that in many professional jobs employees spend a surprising amount of time writing short “essays” of all kinds—reviews of colleagues, requests for larger budgets, project descriptions, sales letters, etc.—and that being proficient in this skill is highly valued in the workplace.

A good letter is like a good short essay.

—It should express an opinion about the story—positive, negative, otherwise.

—It should be *specific*. If the teen likes the story, she needs to say *what* she likes, and *why* she likes it. Same thing if she doesn’t like it.

**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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—The basic format is that of a 5-paragraph (or even a 3-paragraph) essay:

1) Make a general statement, such as, “I can relate to Athena’s story about her Big Fat Greek Life because I was also embarrassed about my culture.”

2) Support your statement with facts and relate it to the story, comparisons with your own life, etc. (This could be 1-3 paragraphs which elaborate on the theme she establishes in the first paragraph.)

3) Conclude. (“I’m glad my friends appreciated my culture, because it made me appreciate it too.”)

You may want to have your students read the letters under the “No More Hitting” headline (p. 11) for models. Each of those writers introduces their letter by making a connection to their own life, and then gives specific examples from the story and from their own lives to support the connection. They conclude with a paragraph that reflects on their experience.

## Throwing Up And Growing Up

This story (p. 4) by an anonymous writer describes a “rite of passage” for many young people: getting sloppy drunk with childhood friends. But instead of bragging about the episode, the writer uses it as a chance to reflect on himself, his friends, and what he wants in the future.

There are several ways you can use this story with your students. Here are two suggestions:



### “Describe Your Friends” Essay

In this short assignment, students will write brief character sketches and describe an incident in which the personalities of their friends came out. The essay must have two elements: a one- or two-paragraph description of at least two friends and the author; plus several paragraphs describing an incident (or “scene”) in which each person’s personality came into play. The vocabulary of “character sketch” and “scene” may seem abstract for your students, but if you show them the model in this story it will become much more concrete for them.

In the first column on page 4 the writer describes two friends: the “outgoing” Harry, and the “wise philosopher” Charlie—and himself, “the silent type.” He also notes that Andrew was the “comedian” and Ricky was the “rebel.”

Later in the story—between the sub-

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heads “You’re Having a Shot With Me” and “The First Solid Laugh in Hours,” the author describes an “incident” in which Ricky, true to his “rebel,” personality, pushes the author into drinking way too much, and also goes out to smoke weed. Because we’ve learned early in the story that the author respects and values his friendship with the more outgoing Harry and Charlie, it is believable that he gave in to the direct pressure of Ricky and the indirect pressure of the group to get drunk with them.

Remind your students: They need to

set up their essay by describing the characters. Even in these short descriptions they should both “tell” and “show.” For example, point out that the writer told us that Harry was outgoing. Then he talked about the “swagger” in his walk, and how he bragged about the writer’s skill when they were picking basketball teams.

Then, once they’ve introduced the characters, they have to describe an incident in which the personalities of the characters come out.

If students are having trouble, use a warm-up in which they throw out adjectives

that describe people: bold, timid, intellectual, funny, shy, reckless, cruel, kind, impulsive, reflective. Write this on the board. Tell students these are the character traits they want to identify and describe in their friends and in themselves. (If students are still having trouble grasping this concept, ask them to think about a movie like *Ocean’s Eleven* or the *Wizard of Oz* which is very explicitly built around character. How would they describe the characters? How did their personalities come out in a major scene?)

## Writing Contest

page 2 \$175 in Prizes  
Deadline: May 2, 2005

### “Who do you feel more comfortable with, your friends or your family?”

Here are some lessons you can use to get students writing on this prompt:

#### Putting details into writing

Tell your students to write down the names of two friends and two relatives. Then ask them to write two sentences about a pleasant or positive interaction they had with each person. Then ask them to write two sentences about a negative experience with each person. Ask for volunteers to read aloud sentences about their relatives. (Don’t ask them to read anything about friends; they may be sitting in the room.)

Many of the students’ statements will be general, such as “My mom drives me crazy.” Your goal is to get them to see the importance of giving specific examples that support their statements. Ask when, where and how their mom annoys them. Is she intrusive? Judgmental? Critical? Never home? Clueless? Ask other students if they think they have a more specific example. Ask everyone to look at their sentences and add one or two examples or details that support the statement. Then ask volunteers to read aloud again. Press students for inter-

esting details.

#### Using detail to build their essay

Point out to students that they now have some raw material for building their essay. Suggest that they look at their sentence and pick the one that brings up the strongest emotion in them, and write their essay around that. For example, if they describe a friend’s unconditional support, they can write an essay about how that makes them feel especially comfortable around friends.

#### Two sides to the essay

Remind students that to explain why one side (friends or family) makes them most comfortable, they should probably also explain why the other side sometimes makes them uncomfortable. Showing the contrast will make their case stronger.

#### Ambiguity

If you see the opportunity during the discussion, point out that it’s ok for them to express ambiguity about their preferences and that’s it ok to write “Sometimes I feel more comfortable with my friends...” or “I love my family but I don’t want them at my prom.”

#### Vocabulary and Context Exercise

For many students (e.g., English Language Learners, students in remedial reading programs, etc.) this story may have difficult vocabulary. However, because it has a simple and entertaining theme about friendship and peer pressure, and an easy-to-follow plot, the difficult vocabulary won’t trip them up too much. Ask students to underline each word they don’t know, and to guess its meaning from context. Then have students look up the words to see how close their guesses are. (Alternatively, you could have students guess aloud, and you could guide them to a correct definition.) Here’s a list of the words that may be most difficult, with a few words of context:

exuding confidence  
reclusive personality  
circumstance faze me  
vintage sports talk  
exceeded my limit  
familiar silent persona  
it was futile  
he was disoriented  
the cars looked picturesque  
serene backdrop  
steadfast strength  
dormant bond

#### Leaving ‘El Combito’

Writer Angy Gonzalez describes her close knit group of friends in her native Colombia and how she handles the heart-break of leaving them to live in New York (p. 3). Here are some questions for discussion.

—Why doesn’t Angy want the group to see her off at the airport when she leaves Colombia? —Where in the story does she give her reasons for leaving like that?

—Why does she choose to go to the United States with her mother? Did she have other options? What advice would you have given her?

—Did you ever have to make a choice that involved losing friends?

—Does Angy replace her group of friends once she settles in New York? Why or why not?

—If Angy had stayed in Colombia, do you think she would have stayed friends with this group, or might they have drifted apart anyway as they got older?

## My Life in Movies

If your students tire of all the stories in this issue about true friendship then this story is for them. Lily Mai, p. 16, describes a completely solitary activity: immersing herself in a celluloid world which helps her escape her less-than-ideal reality and shuts out other people. Here are some questions.

—Do your students have a solitary activity they treasure?

—What does Lily get out of her love of movies?

—Do they see any problems with Lily's attachment to movies and her fantasy life?

—What would they want to ask Lily if she read her story out loud to the group?

## My Big Fat Greek Life

Athena Karoutsos (p. 6) writes about being embarrassed by her Greek culture (the “barbaric” singing, and circle dancing which features breaking plates). When she leaves her private Greek school for a public high school, she becomes friends with teens from many different backgrounds. Much to her surprise, they seem more interested in (and appreciative of) her Greek heritage than she is. Seeing their interest and respect for her background revives her own interest and pride.

### Lesson: Debate/Discussion on Multiculturalism

Write these questions on the board: What's the best way to promote pride in your culture?

a) Stick mostly with your own kind so you don't get influenced by other cultures and lose your own? or

b) Mix with lots of people from many backgrounds so you can compare and contrast your background with theirs?

Ask students to respond to these questions. You can prompt them based on what you know of their experiences. For

example, if your school is mostly Dominican, ask whether the students think there were be more or less Dominican pride if the school were more mixed. You can play devil's advocate: Ask whether cultures will be diluted if people get to know each other so well that they get married—will one culture be squashed in the marriage?

Have students read Athena's story. As they read, tell them to note places where Athena is immersed in her culture (e.g., at her private school, at dances, when she visits Greece). And tell them to note places where she interacts with people from other cultures.

When students are done, ask the same to questions that are on the board again. Has anyone changed or modified their views? (See if students note that Athena got a balance of immersion in her own culture and interaction with others—is a balance perhaps the best way to develop healthy pride in one's own culture plus respect for others?) (Note: There's no “correct” answer to these questions.)

Closing: Ask the students what they think was the most important experience for Athena in learning to appreciate her own culture.

# Practice Lesson for Regents Exam Listening Section

**Use story:** “Stop Following Me,” p. 11

## 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). 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. (NOTE: This lesson omits the report writing section of the Regents exam. It only contains the listening part.)

### Step One: Read the Overview

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

Read this to your students:

**Overview:** You will listen to part of an article written by a teenager. The story is about how she is followed around stores by sales staff who think she might be a shoplifter. You will then answer some multiple choice questions. You will hear the article twice. You may take notes.

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

**IMPORTANT NOTES:** Do not read the entire story. Read from the subhead “I Know Some Teens Steal” in the third column and stop at the end.

Another note: The author uses the expression “red eye” to refer to store personnel who watch her in stores.

When you come to that expression explain it to your students. (It occurs twice in the last four paragraphs.)

After reading the story once, say:

“You make take a few minutes to look over your notes. (Pause) Now I will read the story again.”

### Step Three: Multiple Choice Questions

After reading the article for the second time give them the questions on the next page.

Here are the answers to the multiple choice questions on the next page:

1) b 2) c 3) b 4) c 5) b 6) d 7) c 8) a

# Stop Following Me

## Multiple Choice Questions

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

**1) What is one reason the writer doesn't give for why some teens might steal?**

- a) to have trendy clothes
- b) to get a thrill
- c) to resell stolen goods
- d) to fit in with friends

**2) The amount of money that stores say they lose annually because of shoplifting is**

- a) \$15 billion
- b) over \$20 billion
- c) \$10 billion
- d) less than \$10 billion

**3) What is the main reason the author thinks she is suspected of being a shoplifter?**

- a) she is a teenager
- b) she is black
- c) she shops in Macy's
- d) she spends a lot of time shopping

**4) What does the author sometimes do when she thinks she is being observed too closely?**

- a) she tells the sales person she won't shop there anymore
- b) she threatens to sue the store
- c) she asks to speak with the manager
- d) all of the above

**5) According to the author what group is caught shoplifting the most?**

- a) black teenagers
- b) teenagers in general
- c) white teenagers
- d) black adults

**6) The author relates an incident told to her by another writer. What happens in the incident?**

- a) a black girl and a white girl were caught stealing
- b) two girls were accused of stealing even though they were innocent
- c) the white girl was caught stealing
- d) the black girl was accused of stealing

**7) What were the outcomes of the two lawsuits filed against Macy's?**

- a) the store won both cases
- b) the store lost both cases
- c) the store settled both cases before going to trial
- d) the cases are still pending

**8) What changes does the writer think stores should make in their security procedures?**

- a) she doesn't make any recommendations
- b) stores should hire more minorities
- c) stores should train sales people more carefully
- d) stores should hire more sensitive managers