



Tips for Teachers

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

April 2006

Staying in School

IN THIS ISSUE

Staying in School

Everyone would like to see more New York City high school students graduate, ideally in four years. Our teen writers put together this special issue to inspire their peers to stay in school and to inform those at risk of dropping out about alternative ways of earning a diploma. It contains personal stories of teens displaying the fortitude and smarts needed to stay in school alongside descriptions of alternative programs, interviews with teachers, and listings of DOE programs that help struggling teens get an education.

We've assembled brief reviews of the school stories below to let you quickly see what's in the issue.

a) The stories in the Inspiration section (below) are personal accounts of how struggling students managed to earn their diplomas. Use these stories to show your students how teens like themselves succeeded despite their self-doubts and their lack of consistent family or other types of support.

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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212-279-0708 ext.100
youthcomm.org

Use these stories to start discussions about *what motivated* the students in the stories to succeed, *who helped them* along the way, *what characteristics* the students exhibited (hope, resilience, capacity to sustain relationships), *what they achieved* in the end (graduation, college admissions, increased self-respect and confidence, the approval of others).

b) Most of the other stories have the information that teens need to choose "second chance" programs that will give them a fighting chance to succeed. If the teens in your school are anything like the ones in our program (or the staff in our program) they are thoroughly confused about the options available out there. The informational stories in this issue break down the options.

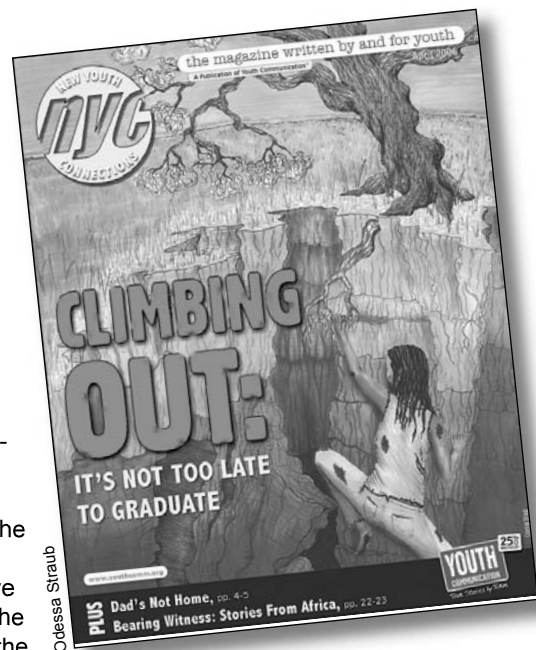
Stay in School Stories

Inspiration Stories

Persistence, Asking for Help, and the Faith of a Grandparent

"From Failure to College," by Tanisia Morris, p. 3.

Tania is a role model for teens who think they can't finish school. She starts junior high school after an elementary school career marred by poor grades and low self-esteem. Inspired by her grandmother's confidence in her she steadily improves her study habits and begins asking teachers and after school tutors for help. Her story ends with her taking an AP history class and enrolling in Lehman College.



Odessa Straub

Transferring to Another School

"Writing My Own Script" by Diane Brandon, p. 7.

Diane relates why she decided to transfer to another school, what she had to do to make it happen, and how she's doing at her new school. A sidebar to this story features an interview with a school guidance counselor about the transfer process.

Getting a GED, Despite No Family Support

"Not Just Lazy," by Dorena Belovet Ruff, p. 8. Dorena profiles Patrick James, a high school drop out who's now enrolled in a GED program. Despite having no familial support and a bunch of slacker friends Patrick managed to change things around for himself.

Mom (and Counselors) Lay Down the Law; Daughter Responds

"Second Chance," by Aracelis Diaz, p. 15.

Tips for Teachers is also available on our web site at:
www.youthcomm.org

Writing Contest #175

page 2, Cash Prizes
Deadline: May 12, 2006

“What makes your best friend your best friend, and why?”

Writing Exercise: Profile of a Best Friend

This issue’s contest question, p. 2, is “What makes your best friend your best friend and why?”

Purpose of lesson: “Show, don’t tell” is a clichéd yet effective approach to improve your writing. Tell your group that writing a contest entry with a lot of details about their best friend will improve their chances of winning a prize. The activity below will help them think about details to put in their entry. You don’t have to use each pre-writing activity but activity #1 should help your students reflect on their friends.

Pre-writing activity #1: Tell your group that this activity will help them get started on writing about their friend. Tell them that you are going to interview them about their best friend. Give them 1 minute to respond to each question in writing. They should jot down short notes and not worry about grammar or other mechanics.

- What is your best friend’s name? Age? School? On what street does he/she live? What three adjective best describe her physical appearance?
- When was the last time you spoke with her? What did you talk about mostly?
- Have you ever done your friend a big favor or helped her out somehow? Has she ever helped you out of a jam? What other persons were involved in the situation?
- List two ways you are similar to her (music tastes, quiet, loud, studious, social, shy). In what two ways are you different?
- When was the last time you had a fight with her? What was it about?
- What was the last movie you saw together? Did you both like it?

- Who do you know who doesn’t like your friend?

Pre-writing activity #2: Have your students read the story “Dad’s Not Home,” on page 4. Ask them how the writer uses details to describe what happened the day her father left the family (e.g., how her good time with her friends was interrupted by her father’s call, her reaction to her sister finding out first, not having her key to the apartment that day, entering the house and realizing her father had taken stuff with him, taking a picture of the altered living room, etc.)

Point out that the writer describes one specific incident—her father leaving the family—around which she weaves her recollections of her family life and her father. The event triggers memories of her father’s kindness, her parents’ sometimes stormy relationship, and how secure she felt living with two parents. Can they think of a single incident that could be the focus of their essay?

Pre-writing activity #3: The Wordsearch puzzle on page 20 features words associated with friendship. Review the list with your students and ask them to think of other friendship words. How many of the words help describe their best friend? Do any of the words remind them of an event or situations involving their best friend?

The essay: Tell your students to describe one or two specific incidents or situations which will show why they are best friends with their best friend. Depending on what pre-writing activities you did in class they should consult their notes from activity # 1, read “Dad’s Not Home,” and look over the Wordsearch list.

If you do nothing else...please pass along a copy of this issue to your guidance department or dropout prevention program. Let us be immodest: This issue contains the clearest description of DOE programs for at-risk students that can be found anywhere. It is an invaluable resource for teens and the adults who work with them. Please make sure the appropriate staff at your school get a copy.

Aracelis describes how her mother “scared the crap out of me” by threatening to withdraw her from school after Aracelis’s two-year cutting party at her mainstream school. She enters City-As-School, a transfer school that offers more individual attention and flexible scheduling. But Aracelis continues her old ways until the school’s counselors rein her in and she sees the light.

Learning from Siblings’ Bad Examples

“Learning From Their Mistakes,” by Anonymous, p. 16.

The author describes how she refused to follow the lead of her brother and sister when they dropped out of school. With the help of her mother she finished high school and is now in college.

Other Ways to Graduate

Places that Help

“Many Ways to Graduate,” pp. 12-13.

These pages describe DOE programs that offer students another path to graduation. There’s information on the Learning to Work program, transfer schools, Program for Pregnant Teens, and Young Adult Borough Centers.



The GED Option

"The GED," p. 14

Some students think that passing the GED is easier than making it through 4 years of regular school. This story offers teens a more realistic view of the GED process, and the skills needed to pass it.

Resource List

"Contact Information," p. 17.

We've listed telephone numbers and addresses for transfer schools, the Young Adult Borough Centers, GED programs, and the Regional Enrollment Centers. (Pin this up on the bulletin board in your guidance office!)

Other Stay in School Stories

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: "Diploma Required," by Lily Mai, p. 11.

Do you need a high school diploma to sweep the floors at the Brooklyn Public Library? Lily interviewed a labor expert about the job situation for dropouts and listed some jobs that require a diploma.

WHY IT HAPPENS: "Dropouts Speak Up," by David Schmutzer, p. 8

David reviews a survey of drop outs to understand why people leave school.

ADVICE FROM TEACHERS: "Speak Out on Dropping Out," p. 9

Our teen staff asked eight teachers what they would say to a prospective dropout and other questions. It's not surprising that most of them stress talking to an adult about their feelings and options.

PREVENTION: "Ruby Can't Do Fractions," by April Daley, p. 6.

April tutors 5th graders who can't add simple fractions and begins to wonder about the value of "social promotion" and the mayor's plan to end it. What can be done in the earlier grades to help students do better in high school?

OTHER STORIES

Civil Wars in Africa pp. 22 and 23

In the story "Fleeing Sierra Leone," writer Natasha Santos interviews a refugee from that country's civil war. She also collaborates with Pauline Gordon to write "Dying in Darfur" about the situation in western Sudan.

Web Site Resources

Regents lessons: The site also includes some of our best lessons for coaching teens on the listening section of the Regents. You can find them under Teacher Resources at www.youthcomm.org

Tips for Teachers: Does your bundle always arrive with the Tips for Teachers newsletter already gone because another teacher grabbed it? You can download the current "Tips for Teachers" newsletter and ones from recent issues.

An archive of recent stories: Youthcomm.org contains selected stories from the more than 40 recent issues of Youth Communication's two

magazines, *New Youth Connections* and *Represent: The Voice of Youth in Foster Care*. There are stories on parents, friendship, food, activism, work, and many other topics. You can print out and use them in advisories, reading classes, counseling groups, and other settings.

Additional resources: Do you know that Youth Communication publishes more than magazines? In fact, we have published more than 70 anthologies of teen writing—many of the award-winning—on dozens of topics. You might want to browse our catalog and order teen-written books from our Web store.

DISCUSSION IDEAS ON LOSS

In "Dad's Not Home" on page 4 Patricia Rogers describes how her father left the family and how she responds to the loss. Here are some discussion ideas around this story. If you read the story silently in class or group you can present the questions before the reading.

- Where in the story does the writer identify her initial reaction to her father's moving out? (See the end of column 2 and column 5 where she admits being numb and in disbelief.) Do your students think this is a realistic reaction?

- What reactions does she have later in the story? What sentences in the last two columns indicate her mood? Does she say she feels angry, guilty, hopeful her dad will come back, curious about why he left?

- Where in the story does she describe her relationship with her father after he's left? What are the advantages of how she reacts to the situation? One advantage is that she maintains a seemingly good relationship with each parent. One disadvantage is that she doesn't know why her father left.

- How would your group describe how well the family communicates with each other? Ask them to point out sentences from the story that illustrate their responses to this question.

- What specific things does Patricia do to try to adjust to the aftermath of her father's flight?



Rosheed Wellington

Letters Ideas

We would love to hear from your students about the dropout issue. Assign them to write letters to us about whether they ever thought about dropping out. Do they know any who have dropped out? What is the main reason they stay in school? Why do they think people drop out in general? What can teachers and others in the schools do to help students stay on track? What advice would they give to someone who's on the verge of quitting school? What do they think of the strategies used by some of the writers in this issue to get their education back on track?

Summer Writing Workshops

Encourage Your Students to Apply!

Youth Communication's summer writing workshops are opportunities for teens to improve their writing skills, learn about journalism, and write stories for the fall issues of *New Youth Connections* magazine. Participants receive intensive training and work closely with Youth Communication's experienced full-time instructional staff. (You can learn more

about our staff's backgrounds and credentials by hitting the "About Us" button on our home page (youthcomm.org) and then clicking on "Staff.")

Many of our best writers tell us that they applied because a teacher or other important adult suggested that they give it a shot. Please think about teens in your classes who like to write, who are original thinkers, and who want to have a voice.

Point out the ad to them and encourage them to apply.

We recently mailed workshop applications to all NYC subscribers. Please look for them. The applications are also available online at youthcomm.org. See the ad on the back cover of this issue for more information.



Write for NYC. Improve your writing. Express your thoughts and opinions. Find out what's going on in the city. Be a voice for New York teens.

27th Annual



SUMMER WRITING WORKSHOP

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGES 15-20

July 5 - August 15, 2006

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Our summer workshop is demanding. No prior journalism experience is required, but you must be willing to commit yourself to a rigorous schedule. We will meet Monday through Thursday for six weeks. You will be shown how to create personal narratives and spend time "on the street" as a reporter.

To print an application visit us on the web at: WWW.YOUTHCOMM.ORG

or call:

212-279-0708 ext. 100

If you leave a message, speak clearly and slowly. Leave your full name, address, apartment #, borough and zip code.

NYC Summer Writing Workshop

224 West 29th Street—2nd floor
New York, NY 10001



The workshop is free because we cover the \$800 cost for each participant.

Deadline for Completed Applications is June 5, 2006