



Tips for Teachers

A Guide for Using *New Youth Connections* in Schools and After-School Programs

April 2008

IN THIS ISSUE

Writing Contests—Cash Prizes

(We increased the amount students can win to \$150, \$75, and \$50).

Reminder: Your students can enter the contest by going to our website and clicking on the “enter contest” button. Our web address is youthcomm.org.

Writing contest #188

What’s the strangest thing you’ve ever done? Why did you do it and what did you get out of the experience?

p. 2, Deadline: May 5, 2008

See below for lesson ideas.

Writing Lesson 1: Interview and Reflect Back

Write the contest topic and the following questions on the board (or a handout):

- What time of day and year did it happen? Day, night, winter, summer?
- What locations were involved? School, street, home?
- Who was with you when it happened? Friends, enemies, relatives, teachers? Did anyone get mad at you or congratulate you?
- What motivated you to do it? What did you want to feel as a result of doing it?

- What did you or other people say while it happened?
- What physical objects were involved in the event?
- How did you feel while it was happening? What about after?

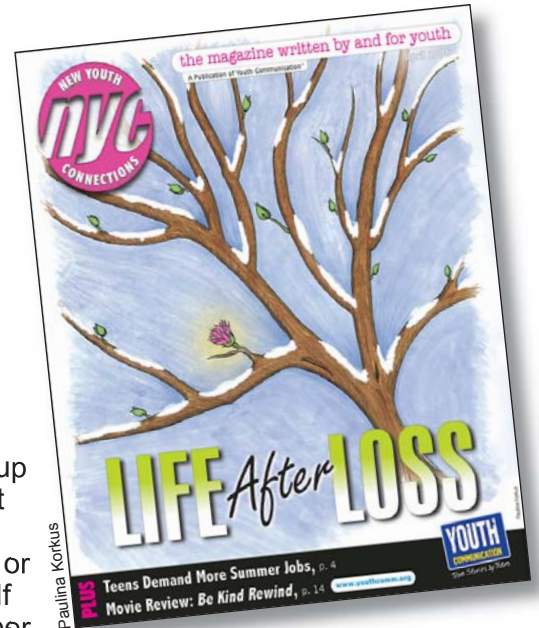
Tell students to look at the contest question. Warm them up with some brainstorming about strange things they’ve done or other people—such as friends or family members—have done. If appropriate, you can share a personal experience.

Then ask them to complete this sentence: “The strangest thing I have ever done was the time I _____.”

Now that everyone has a topic, tell them to pretend they are being interviewed by Oprah about this experience and she is asking them the questions on the board. They should spend 1-2 minutes writing down responses to the questions. When the “interview” is over, give each person 15 minutes to write a short contest entry about his or her experience.

Writing Lesson 2: Grabbing the Reader (or, how to increase your chances of winning \$150)

Tell your students that the writing contest is judged by the teen readers at NYC. Each teen has to read a dozen or more entries. If



you grab the judge’s attention at the beginning you have a much better chance of winning. (You might remind them that this isn’t just true of the writing contest. It’s also true of college application essays and cover letters for jobs. Learning to grab the reader from the start of an essay is a powerful skill.)

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

1. Prep

Write these story titles and page numbers on the board:

- “Through Thick and Thin,” p. 8
- “The Longest Haircut of my Life,” p.12
- “A World Away From Her,” p. 22.

(*Note:* You may want to use the above writing prompts for Lesson 1 later in this lesson. If so, write them on the board too.)

Read the first sentences of each story to *yourself*. Note that the writers of the first two stories decided not to start at the chronological beginning of their tales. They led off with perhaps the most dramatic moments of their stories: Kaela learns her uncle has cancer while Edgar walks into the barber for a monumental haircut. Then they described the situations that led up to those moments. The third story starts differently, with the author making a general statement rather than putting herself in the middle of the events.

2. Introduce lesson

Hand out the April issue of *New Youth Connections*. Tell the group that you want them to enter the writing contest. Tell them that

they are going to read the first sentences of three stories in the issue to see how some writers try quickly to grab the attention of their audience. They can then use these first sentences as models.

3. Read the sentences

Ask them to read the opening sentences of the stories on the board. When they are done ask them which one they liked the best. Which sentences made them want to read the whole story? Could they guess anything about the story from the sentences (would it be serious, funny, educational?).

Point out that the author of the third story could have started it differently. She could have started it by describing an event she shared with her grandmother or the moment she learned her grandmother was very ill.

4. Ask students to read the contest question on page 2.

Have the group brainstorm ideas they might write about.

5. Write a first sentence

Ask students to write a first sentence that starts the story at an interesting or dramatic moment. For example, if they are writing

about entering a pie-eating contest, an opening line might be “I looked down at the golden top of the blueberry pie, tucked my hands behind my back and waited for the judge to blow the start whistle.”

6. Homework (or in-class writing)

Assign them to read the first two stories in the list and pay attention to how the writer described what took place before and after the dramatic opening. They can use these stories as a models for describing their own event. Tell them you will collect their essays and enter them into the contest. (Make sure each submission has a name, address, email and phone number.)

Writing Contest #189

If you could pick anybody to be the President, who would it be? Why? (This can be any real person, living or dead—including people you know.)

p. 2, Deadline: June 30, 2008

See below for lesson ideas.

Get More Teaching Resources at the Youth Communication Website (www.youthcomm.org)

- You can order dozens of books and teacher guides on topics your students are interested in.

- You can download over 250 stories from past issues of *New Youth Connections* and *Represent: The Voice of Youth in Foster Care*.

- You can download lesson ideas from past issues of “Tips

for Teachers.”



- You can find out about writing workshops for young people in foster care.

- You can browse our book and DVD catalog and order from our e-store.

- You can have your students enter our writing contests.

Five paragraph essay

If you are teaching the 5-paragraph essay, this is a good opportunity to have students practice. They can introduce their candidate in the first paragraph, give three supporting arguments in the next paragraphs, and then conclude in the final paragraph.

Creative approaches

Here are some other ideas for how students can approach this essay.

- **Speech:** Students can write their essay in the form of a nominating speech. Tell them that these speeches often start with, “My fel-

low Americans...” and then go on to praise to candidate. “My mother would make the greatest president because....”

• **TV Commercial:** Students can do a treatment for a commercial. For example, first scene: Phone rings at 3:00 a.m. My mother, the President, stays asleep because why are the taxpayers paying the salaries of all those aides?

• **Best on the issues:** Ask students to imagine five important issues (such as the war in Iraq, jobs for teens, the border fence with Mexico, etc.) and describe why their candidate would be the best person at handling those issues.

Love Him or Leave Him?

Writing Lesson

Writer Jerrica Neal pledges her loyalty to her boyfriend of 3 1/2 months after he is sent to jail for three years (“Boyfriend Behind Bars,” p. 10). Your writers will assess her reasoning and write her a letter with their advice: remain loyal? Dump him? Or something in between.

Goal: Students will consider the pros and cons of a long distance relationship. They will also explore the thinking of the writer. (They will read about someone

who seems locked into inflexible, either/or thinking about a complicated situation.) The writing activity will help them reflect on the value of revisiting a decision with new information and new perspectives.

1. Prep

Read the story yourself and mark the paragraphs where Jerrica demonstrates her commitment to wait for her boyfriend despite some reservations. These occur often in the fifth and sixth columns of the story on page 11 where she writes about refusing to date other boys and talking to relatives and friends who reinforce her decision to wait for her boyfriend. And notice the next to last paragraph of the story, where she still expresses hope that he won’t cheat on her once he’s out of jail, despite his unwillingness to commit to being faithful.

Then list these possible actions on the board:

- Stay with the plan
- Forget the plan
- Rethink the plan

Have paper and pen/pencils in the room.

2. Introduce story

Tell the group they are going to read a story by Jerrica Neal, a girl who decides not to date other boys until her boyfriend finishes his 3-year jail sentence. After reading the story they are going to write letters to her with their advice on her situation. (If they want they can send their letters to *New Youth Connections* for possible publication. We will also forward all of the letters to Jerrica.)

3. Read the story

You can have the students read the story silently, you can read it aloud, or you can have the group take turns reading it aloud.

4. Writing activity

When you finish the reading, point to the choices on the board.

Youth Communication’s 29th Annual Summer Writing Workshop



For teens who want to improve their skills, make their voices heard, and provide important information to their peers.

Ten young people will spend six weeks this summer learning how to write stories for the fall issues of *New Youth Connections* magazine. Students will improve their writing and editing skills, learn how to interview and conduct other research, and get the

opportunity to tell their stories and express their opinions to tens of thousands of readers. Two experienced full-time adult editors with Master’s degrees in journalism will run the workshop.

For application information see the ad on page 24 of the April issue of *New Youth Connections*. You can print an application from youthcomm.org.

Ask the group to write a letter to Jerrica. Tell them the letter must take one of the three positions:

- support what she's doing
- advise her to forget about Sean
- advise her to rethink or modify her current plan.

For the last option you might ask the group to brainstorm ideas, such as suggesting that Jerrica could socialize with other boys (who knows who she might meet?). Or she could tell Sean he has to commit to her in the very next letter or she'll drop him; or she could talk to Sean's friends to see what they know about his situation.

Whatever they choose, they have to refer to three specific pieces of information from the story that back up their advice. You can offer these examples:

"You should stay with him because you love him. Like you said in the story, (followed by a quote)."

"Dump him. Like you said in the story, he wrote to you about maybe messing around when he gets out and you said he won't say he will only be with you."

5. Role play

After you read the story ask for two volunteers to play Jerrica's friends. One will argue that Jerrica should stand by her man and one will argue that she should show him the door. As they do the role play they should have a copy of the story in front of them and quote from it to make their points.

6. Discuss

• Where in the story does Jerrica tell us that she won't go out with other boys? What do you



12 and 13. You should read along.

Find: Ask each group to locate the words on the list in the three stories. They should write down the word and alongside the word they should write the name of the story they found it in (use *goat*, *hair* and *knock* to stand for the full title of the stories). Do the search yourself.

Discuss: After five minutes stop the search. Go down the list and see which groups located which words. The words you underlined do not necessarily appear exactly in the stories but they are things the writers did lose. Did your groups see them? If not, ask them to go through the stories again and try to find where the writers brought them up.

Are the underlined words important to them? Why? Ask them to give some examples of these things in their daily lives. For example, when do they enjoy privacy? How independent are they from their family? Do they think their peers respect them?

think of that decision?

- Do you think Sean's crime should cause her any concern? What about the three years Sean loses in jail? Does she ever state that she worries he will change a lot in jail?
- Have you ever really wanted something and had to wait a long time for it to come to you?
- Do a gender switch. Do they think Sean would wait for Jerrica if their roles were reversed?
- Would the "dump him" people in your group feel differently if Sean were spending three years in the armed forces instead of in jail?
- Does Jerrica mention talking to anyone who doesn't agree with her decision?

Who Lost What?

Scavenger Hunt/Reading Activity

Prep: Write the list to the right on the board. In your copy of the list underline these words: privacy, trust in family, individuality, independence, openness with family, and respect of peers. Have paper and pencils at hand. Divide the group into smaller groups of 2-3. Tell them they are going to read three very short pieces by teens about losing things were dear to them.

Read: Have the teens read the three short pieces on pages

- Locked door
- Hair
- Privacy
- Diegue
- Princess role
- Trust in family
- Romance novels
- Pet
- Individuality
- Independence
- Haiti
- Malaysia
- Openness with family
- Chance at a job
- Roosters in the morning
- Taiwanese TV shows
- Respect of peers
- Godparents