



Tips for Teachers

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

December 2001

Writing Contest— \$150 in Prizes

“Describe your best or worst holiday memory.”

Writing Contest, p. 2:
Encourage your students to enter this month’s Writing Contest, which offers \$175 in prizes: Describe your best or worst holiday memory. You may want to devote part of your class to discussing this topic, before turning to the writing. This is a wonderful opportunity for students to focus on *descriptive writing*. They can “set the scene” by telling us where and when it was, the sights, sounds and smells, and what about the holiday may it most memorable.

One technique that we sometimes find helpful is to identify the “core emotion” in the story, and then have students write about the events that led to that emotion. So, for example, if the core emotion of the story is disappointment, the students would want to write about anticipation, and then show how reality did not match their hopes. If their story is about surprise (e.g., the unexpected arrival of a loved one) they might want to first write about how important that person is to them, giving examples—which shows the reader how much that person means to them.

Also, remind the teens that they don’t have to describe the whole holiday. They only need to describe the parts that made it memorable.

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THIS ISSUE’S THEME: Sexual Harassment

In this issue of *NYC*, several writers examine how sexual harassment has affected their lives, leaving them feeling vulnerable and degraded. They discuss incidents ranging from unwanted comments on the street to physical advances at work to an outright assault in school. They give insight into what young women can do if confronted by similar situations.

Speaking Up About an Assault

In “The Incident,” p. 3, the anonymous writer describes how she and two of her female friends were groped and sexually harassed by three basketball players in the stairwell at her school. The writer reports the incident, the boys are expelled, and the writer is left feeling distrustful of men.

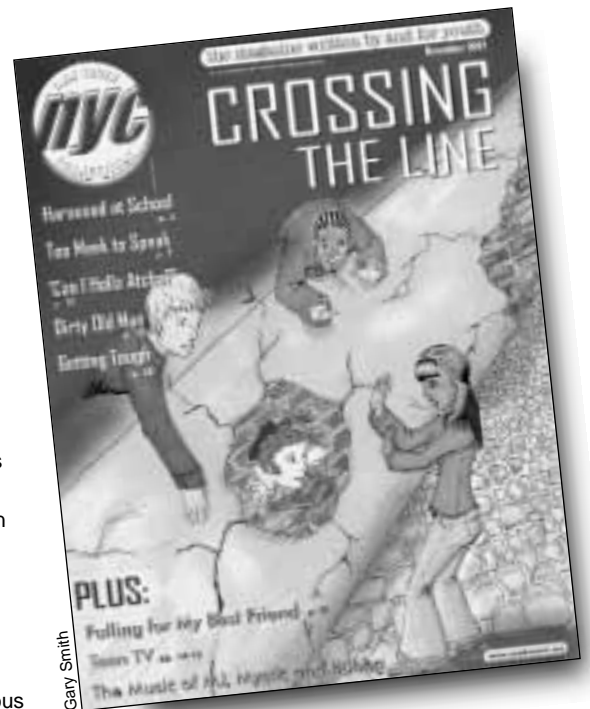
Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—The writer wonders if she could have prevented the attack. Could she have prevented the attack? Why or why not?

—Why do you think the basketball players attacked the girls? Why did they think they could get away with it in school?

—After the incident, one of the writer’s friends thinks the writer took what happened “too seriously.” If you were the writer, how would you have responded to that friend?

—The writer says she feels more comfortable talking to her friends about what happened than to a counselor, because a counselor looks at the situation “from outside.” What does the writer mean by that? Who would you have felt more comfortable talking with, your friends or a counselor? Why?



A note on the lessons

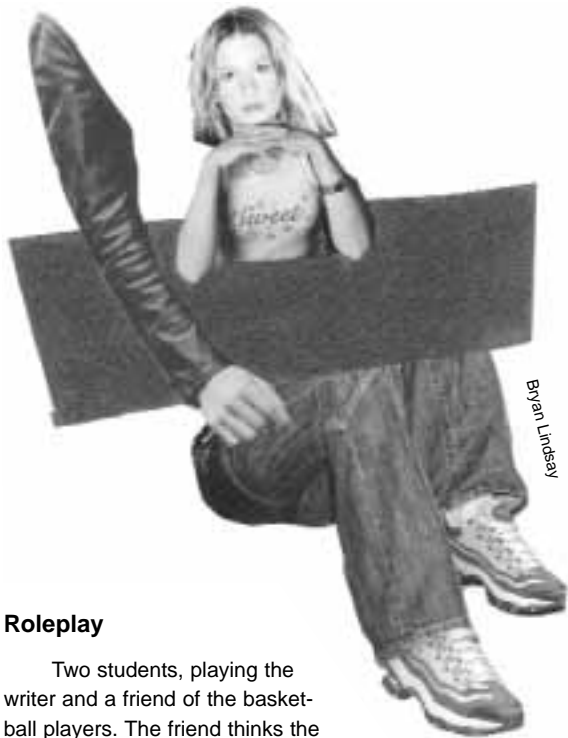
The following lessons are designed to promote reflection on issues raised by the stories in *NYC*. Each story is summarized briefly, followed by prompts that can be used to initiate discussion and/or brief writing assignments. In addition, role plays and group exercises are sometimes suggested for more 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.



Bryan Lindsay

Roleplay

Two students, playing the writer and a friend of the basketball players. The friend thinks the writer made too much of the incident and shouldn't have reported it. The writer explains why she's glad she reported it.

Group activity

Students can work in pairs or small groups. The groups are in charge of coming up with a set of rules or guidelines for behavior, clearly explaining what is sexual harassment and what isn't. They also have to develop a list of punishments for offenders. Have the groups share and compare their ideas in a general discussion with the class

Harassment at Work

In "Too Meek to Speak," p. 5, Victoria Sorrisio describes how a co-worker makes physical advances to her at their school internship. While Victoria rejects the advances, she doesn't report the boy. When she's harassed at another job, this time she takes action.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Why does Victoria put up with Mike's comments and actions for so long? Why doesn't she report him? What is your reaction to Victoria's explanation?

—If you were Victoria, how would you have handled Mike? What would you have done differently? What would you have done the same?

—What might have made it easier for Victoria to report the harassment at her job? Could her workplace have made it easier for her in some way? How?

Roleplay

Two students, playing Victoria and a friend. Victoria doesn't want to report Mike, because she doesn't want to get him in trouble and fears no one will believe her. The friend wants to convince Victoria that Mike must be reported.

Hassled on the Street

In "Can I Holla Atacha? No!," p. 10, Allajah Young talks about how degraded she feels by the constant sexual harassment she experiences walking down the street. She wonders how men would feel if positions were reversed.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Allajah says some men blame women for the harassment, saying they dress provocatively. What is your reaction to this?

—Allajah says some girls and women welcome catcalls. What is your reaction to this?

—For the guys: the writer says that guys wouldn't like it if they were harassed on the street. After reading Allajah's article, do you have a different view of the harassment women face? Why or why not?

Roleplay

Two students, playing Allajah and a man on the street. The man makes an inappropriate comment to Allajah. Allajah lets him know why his comment is not welcome. The man tries again (he really wants to get her number), in a way that he thinks will be more appealing to Allajah.

The Stranger in Her Building

Sabrina Rencher, in "Dirty Old Man," p. 17, has a scary encounter when a man comes by her apartment building, saying he wants to buy the property: he tries to touch her in the hallway. She deflects his advances and tells her mother.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—If you were in Sabrina's shoes, would you have handled the situation differently? If so,

how? If not, why not?

—What does Sabrina say she shouldn't have done? What does Sabrina do that was right for the situation?

Roleplay

Two students, playing Sabrina and a friend. The friend thinks what happened to Sabrina wasn't that bad. Sabrina explains how the incident affected her deeply.

TEEN RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY

In these articles, several writers discuss the complications of sex and love, and the hazards of teen pregnancy.

Love or Friendship?

The anonymous writer in "Me and Zarah...Zarah and Everyone Else," p. 12, has a very close friendship with a girl named Zarah and longs to become physically involved with her. But he also worries about ruining their friendship and Zarah's many relationships with both sexes. When the writer does become involved with her, things fizzle, and he realizes he wanted Zarah to be someone she clearly was not.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Have you ever been in a situation similar to the writer's, where you wanted something more from a friend than they could give? What did you want? What ended up happening?

—Did a friendship ever change because you had a relationship with that person? Did it change for the better or worse? If you had to do it over, would you become involved with that person? Why or why not?

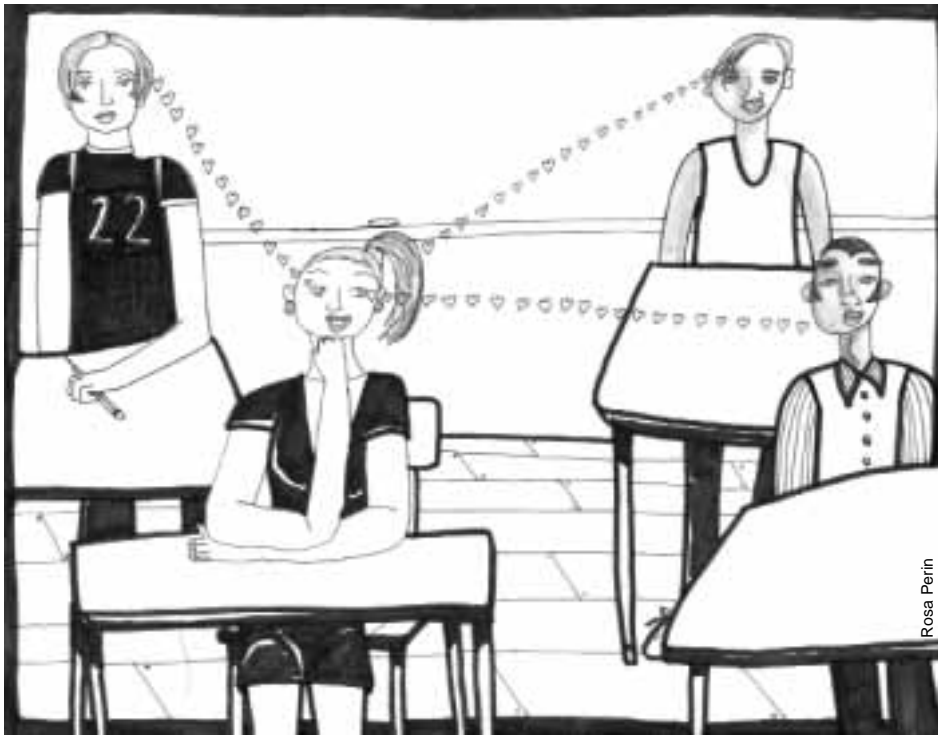
—The writer values emotional closeness in a relationship more than any other thing. What do you value most in a friendship or relationship, and why?

Roleplay

Two students, playing Zarah and the



Karolina Zaniesienko



writer. Zarah doesn't understand why she and the writer can't continue to "casually date." The writer explains what he wants from a relationship, and why Zarah can't give it to him.

Motherhood Can Wait

On p. 19, Tangela Harris, in "Motherhood Can Wait," writes about how she and her two sisters were brought up strictly by their mother, who had to drop out of high school when she became pregnant. Although she's tempted, Tangela sticks to her mother's rules and doesn't date during high school.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Because she became pregnant at a young age, Tangela's mother brings up her daughters in a strict way. How do your parents bring you up, and what reasons do they give for it?

—Tangela's mother forbids her to date boys while in high school. Do you think this was the right approach for the mother to take? Why or why not?

—Tangela feels a lot of temptations in high school, but manages to avoid them. What are the main temptations in your life, and how well do you avoid them?

—Even though her parents' rules are strict, Tangela doesn't regret them because they've worked. Do you see the wisdom in your parents' rules? Why or why not?

—Tangela believes that "if more parents took their children's dating privileges away," the number of teenage pregnancies would decrease. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Roleplay

Two students, playing Tangela and a friend. The friend thinks Tangela should ignore her parents' rules and date boys. Tangela disagrees and explains why.

Group activity

Students can work in pairs or small groups. The groups should come up with ideas on how parents should raise children—of both sexes—to prevent teenage pregnancies. Have the groups share and compare their ideas in a general discussion with the class.

Sex Too Soon

And on p. 26, the anonymous writer in "Performance Anxiety" writes about how he entered into a sexual relationship with his girlfriend before he was ready, and ended up having performance problems in bed. Had he waited to have sex, his first relationship would have been more special.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—The writer believes you should have sex only with someone you love. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

—The writer says that sex is a big step he wasn't ready for. What makes a person ready to have sex?

—The writer's parents "don't

want to know" what is going on in his sex life. Was that a good approach for them to take? Why or why not?

—The writer is courageous in openly discussing his sexual fears and mistakes. Do you believe there's a value for teens in reading this kind of open discussion? If so, what is it? If not, why not?

OTHER STORIES

The Joy of Dance

In "Crawl, Walk, Run, Dance—My Life," p. 6, Jessi Colon describes her passion for dance, which began with her first performance at age 3 and has led to a performance before President Clinton. She practices rigorously and, despite injuries and stress, wants to dance professionally.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Jessi's passion is dance. What is your passion? What do you gain from it? What role do you want it to play in your future life?

—Through dance, Jessi discovers "a form of communication that was very natural and liberating" for her. Do you have an activity or practice in your life that helps you express your feelings? What is it, and how does it help you?

—Jessi has to sacrifice a lot to pursue her love of dance. What sacrifices do you make to pursue what you love most? Do you view them as sacrifices? Why or why not?





Rosa Perin

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

In "Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired," p. 8, Marianna Rybak describes her frustration and near despair over having an illness that leaves her exhausted, but that no one can cure (or even correctly diagnose). Gradually she's learned to live with chronic fatigue syndrome and hopes to help others with the condition.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Have you been in a similar situation to Marianna's, where you had an illness or condition that no one understood or didn't believe you had? How did you feel about not being believed or understood? What eventually happened?

—When Marianna finds out that her illness has a name, she feels relieved. Why do you think she feels relieved?

—For a time, Marianna falls into denial about her illness, and then she experiences despair. What middle ground does Marianna eventually find between denial and despair? How does it help her deal with her illness?

Roleplay

Two teens, playing Marianna and a friend. The friend thinks she wouldn't be able to go with her life if she had chronic fatigue syndrome. Marianna wants her to know how she has learned to live with the condition, and that even some good has come from it.

Boob Tube

In "Turned Off by Teen TV" and "Giving Teen TV a Reality Check," pps. 14-16, Abanty Farzana writes about her disgust with mainstream TV shows about teens: they focus on romance and leave out all the difficult realities of everyday life. She proposes her own show,

where teens deal with the tensions of school and home.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Do you feel most TV shows about teens are realistic? Why or why not?

—What's your favorite show? What makes it your favorite?

—Do you like that most TV shows about teens focus on romance, or would you like them to focus on more serious issues, like school and parents?

Group activity

Students can work in pairs or small groups. The groups are to come up with a plot of a 30 minute show with teenagers. The show should have one central conflict (e.g., one of the characters plans to cheat on her boyfriend; the other characters think she's making a mistake). There should also be at least three characters, and with brief sketches of how they respond to the conflict and interact with the other characters. After students have determined their conflict and their characters, they should "pitch" them to the



Rosa Perin / NYC

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

We welcome letters to the editor and publish most of them. 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 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..."

rest of the class. They need to explain why their characters are more realistic than those on TV. In the end, the class votes for the most realistic show

Watch Your Step

Sabrina Rencher, in "Getting Tough," p. 28, describes how taking a self-defense course for women has made her feel more confident on the threatening streets.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Sabrina feels worried about her safety on the streets. How safe do you feel? What steps or precautions do you take?

—Would you consider, like Sabrina, taking a self-defense course? Why or why not?

—In addition to taking a self-defense course, what else could Sabrina have done to increase her confidence and sense of safety?



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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