



# Tips for Teachers

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

December 2007

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### Writing Contests—Cash Prizes

Reminder: Your students can enter the contest by going to our website and clicking on the “enter contest” button. Our web address is [www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org)

#### Writing contest #186:

Write a Letter to Your Parents

**p. 2 Deadline: February 11, 2008**

Each year we invite *NYC* readers to write letters to their parents about something they have been reluctant to tell them. This contest generates more enthusiasm (and essays) than any other. Your students will enjoy writing these letters—and you’ll learn a lot about them.

They can write about anything, and over the years they have written about everything: cutting school,

**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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falling in love, taking drugs, etc. They have written about feelings of love and hatred toward their parents, challenges they face, hopes for the future, etc.

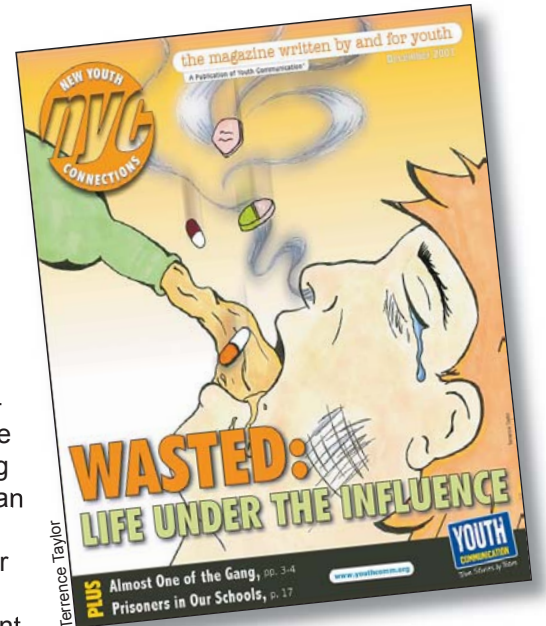
Please tell your students that the letters need not be about dramatic or sensational situations like contracting AIDS or contemplating suicide. Any situation or feeling can produce a letter that’s likely to be published: breaking a plate, anger about not getting a gift, cutting a class, unspoken love for the parent or a sibling. On a humorous note, one year we published a letter from a son confessing that he was a Martian. (NOTE: Some of the young people in your class or group may not be living with their biological parents. Remind everyone that they can write a letter to a guardian as well.)

Remind your students that because many of the letters reveal very private information the essays will be published anonymously, and we’ll change a few details if necessary to conceal the writer’s identity. The winners’ names will be chosen at random.

PS: If you send a class set please make sure each entry has a name and address. (The name and address should be on a separate piece of paper so we can place them in a hat from which we draw the winners.)

#### A Letters Writing Lesson

The popularity of this contest suggests that teens have a lot on their mind that they’d like to share with their parents. You can use the contest to



start class interchanges about families and trust.

Help your students get started on this contest by sharing some of the opening lines from previous letters:

- I’m writing you this letter to confront you about how I am feeling.
- This is something that you never knew.
- There is something I would like to tell you.
- Ma, I am writing this letter to let you know all the things I did that you didn’t know about.
- First of all, I want to say, “I love you.”
- I have been more or less honest with all my life.
- I guess I’d like to think that I tell you everything but...

NOTE: Use the lesson below on the story “Why Are Parents Clueless About Drugs” to get your students thinking about this topic.

## Writing contest #185:

If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be and why?

**Deadline: December 31, 2007**

(Note: We cannot be sure when NYC is printed. If the deadline for this contest has passed by the time you get your copies, please have students enter contest #186 (above).

### Lesson Idea Related to Contest #185: *Changes You Could Make*

Tell your students that they will read a short essay about changes in a young man's life. Tell them that reading a story can give them ideas about writing for the contest. This story is a prompt to help them think about what changes they would like to make in their lives.

Have your group read "Weed Filled a Void" on page 12. It is very short—you and your group can read it aloud in a few minutes. Tell them that although the story tells about drug use you want them to focus on the part of the story that is about friendship and peer pressure.

After the reading, ask your students what changed for the writer. Ask them to read aloud the sentences in the story that touch on those changes. They should be able to talk about two changes: 1) after transferring to a new school the author falls in with a druggie crowd and he starts using 2) he grows apart from his druggie friends and finds new ways to enjoy himself.



### Assignment:

1) Ask students to make a list of three things they would like to change about relationships with their friends or with the activities they and their friends do together. (Emphasize again that you are not talking about drug use but about how they relate to their friends.)

2) Tell them to expand each item into a paragraph of three to five sentences. Tell them they can expand their idea by giving an example (an anecdote), or explaining why it is important or stating what emotions would be involved with the change.

3) Ask students to look at their three paragraphs. What is similar about them? (Explain that this similarity is their theme. For example, if a student notices that in each of her examples she needs to be more assertive, that's her theme.) Tell students to write an introduction paragraph that states the change they want to make.

4) Finally, ask students to imagine how life would be different if they made the change. This is their concluding paragraph.

Voila! Before they know it, your students will have written a solid five paragraph essay.

### Lesson: 'Close Reading' & Five Paragraph Essay

Sloppy reading is the source of much misery for students. If they don't read the essay or the problem closely, they can't answer the questions (whether it's English, social studies, or even math or science.) And they certainly won't do well on standardized tests. This lesson will help students practice close reading.

#### Objective

—Emphasize the importance of close reading.

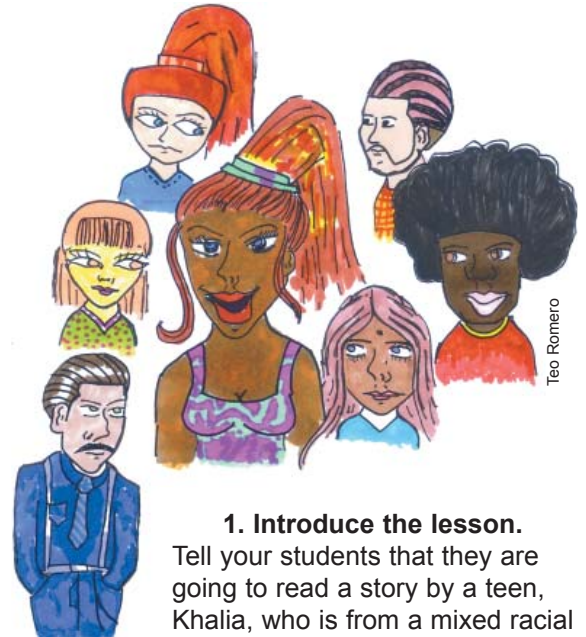
—Show that paying attention to

paragraphs can help with comprehension.

—Demonstrate comprehension by writing a summary of the article.

### Story: "Mixed and Proud of It," by Khalia Alicea, p.10.

Materials needed: Each student should have a copy of the story and a pen.



#### 1. Introduce the lesson.

Tell your students that they are going to read a story by a teen, Khalia, who is from a mixed racial background. She has had good, bad, and unclear feelings about being mixed. Tell your students that they will mark each paragraph of her story with a "g" or a "b" or a "c." The "g" means she has told the reader something good about her mixed ethnicity. The "b" signifies that Khalia has related something bad or negative. If the reader is not sure whether the paragraph should be good or bad then she or he should write "c" for "can't tell." [Write these on the board so it's clear.]

Tell students that they will also need to underline a word or two in each paragraph that backs up their "b" or "g." For example, in the first paragraph they could underline "upset" or "making fun." (Do this on your copy. You will be able to identify each paragraph easily. Note that the start of the article has many more b's than g's.)

#### 2. Read the story and rate the paragraphs.

Hand out the magazines

(or copies of the article) and direct the group to page 10. Tell them that they should pay attention to how the story is divided into paragraphs and how each paragraph usually contains one main idea or conveys one main feeling. Then remind them to label each paragraph and underline one or two words.

You may want to demonstrate the lesson by reading the first three paragraphs, assigning them a letter, and saying what word or words you would underline. Note: the third paragraph looks like a “c” for “can’t tell.”

Students can read silently and mark up the story on their own. Or you can ask each student to read a paragraph aloud, and then tell the group what letter described the paragraph and what word they selected to back up their letter selection. Tell the others in the group to read along and enter their own choices for each paragraph.

**3. Discussion.** After the reading and the marking ask your students if they see a pattern in the b’s and g’s. The answer you hope to get is that there are lots of b’s until the middle of the story (this occurs in the third column under the sub-head “Seeing Myself on Film.”)

Ask the group what happened in the story that changed the pattern. Did she do something? Did her friends or family do something? Direct their attention to the third column where the proliferation of g’s should give them a clue. One of the answers to these questions is that once she started feeling better about herself (especially her appearance) she felt better about her ethnicity.

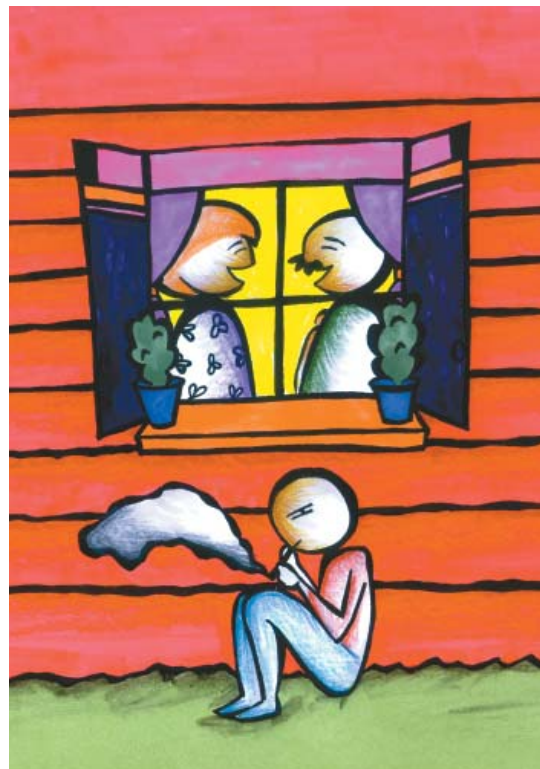
**4. Writing exercise: Five paragraph essay for beginners.** Ask your group to write a five paragraph summary of the story. You can use these guiding questions for each paragraph. (If possible, give them a handout with the guiding questions. The questions will help students feel less lost and see that there is a clear structure for

the five paragraph essay.)

*First paragraph:* Introduce the reader to Khalia. What is her ethnicity and family situation? How did she used to feel about her background? How does she feel about it now?

*Second paragraph:* Look at the paragraphs you have marked with a b.

Give the reader two or three examples of Khalia feeling bad about being of mixed ancestry. What happened to her in the story? Include 3 specific examples from the story.



*Third paragraph:* Tell the reader why she began to change. (Why the b paragraphs become g paragraphs.)

*Fourth paragraph:* Look at the paragraphs you have marked with a g. What part of her ethnicity does she write about with pride and happiness?

*Last paragraph:* Tell the reader what you think about Khalia and how she changed. Would you like her if you met her? Does she remind you of anyone you know?

## Lesson: Discussion about Parent/Teen Communication

Note: After this lesson they should be thinking about communication within families. After the lesson ask them to enter Writing Contest #186; it asks teens to write a letter to their parents about something going on in their lives. (See discussion on the contest on page one of this Tips.)

### Objective

Teens will investigate the level of parent/teen communication among their peers. Teens will think about how to improve communication.

*Story:* “Why Are Parents Clueless About Drugs?” by Natalia Taverez. p. 9.

Tell your group they are going to read a story about drug-using teenagers who deceive their parents. You are going to ask some questions about the story and then they will take an anonymous survey about how well they communicate with their parents.

**1. Read the story aloud** with your group. (You can read it, or have teens take turns reading it aloud.)

**2. Ask some or all of the following questions** to insure that they have understood the story.

How many friends did she interview and what did they have in common?

What did Natalia lie to her parents about in the story?

What does Natalia think would happen if her friends communicated more with their parents? What do her friends think?

The author uses a survey in the story. What is the main point or finding of the survey?

**3. Conduct an in-class survey.** There are five questions in the survey. Copy these onto a separate piece of paper and hand them out. Tell students to answer them (but not put their names on the survey). [Note: Also copy this survey onto the board. You will tabulate the results on the board.]

1) What do your parents know about your school life (classes, teachers, schedule, extra curricular activities)?

1 = a lot 2 = a little 3 = not much or not at all

2) What do they know about your dating relationships?

1 = a lot 2 = a little 3 = not much or not at all

3) What do they know about the friends you are with during non-school hours and what you do together?

1 = a lot 2 = a little 3 = not much or not at all

4) What do they know about your music, the books you read or movies you see?

1 = a lot 2 = a little 3 = not much or not at all

5) Are you satisfied with how you and your parents communicate?

1 = very satisfied 2 = somewhat



Shamel Allison

satisfied 3 = not satisfied

**4. Tabulate the survey.** Give the stack of surveys to one student. Doing one question at a time, have her read out the results. (For example, for question 1, she would read out something like, "A lot; A lot; Not much; A little....etc). You can tick off the responses on the board as she read them.

When you're done, the results of the survey will be obvious for everyone to see. [This won't take long.]

**5. Discussion:** Ask students what

stands out for them in the results. Are they predictable? Surprising? Honest?

**6. Closing questions**

- a. Should parents and teens communicate more?
- b. What is one thing that parents could do to improve communication?
- c. What is one thing teens could do to improve communication?

**Lesson: Vocabulary**

Story to use: "A Fine Line by Natasha Santos p. 4.

Natasha writes about what happened to her when she abused over-the-counter drugs. Tell your students that there are 18 vocabulary words in her story that they need to know in order to understand what Natasha went through.

Before the class, take 18 index cards and write one of the words listed below on each card. Give at least one card to each student (or allot them as best you can). Take turns reading the story and ask the students to speak up when they see their word in the story. Ask the group what it means and if they ever use it in their conversations.

Or you can list the words on the board and call attention to them as they come up in the story.

- |                |               |
|----------------|---------------|
| Slavic         | psychedelic   |
| apathetic      | spewing       |
| hallucinations | stakes        |
| reckless       | kaleidoscopes |
| incarceration  | presumably    |
| symptoms       | disconnect    |
| consequences   | decipher      |
| reprieve       | apparently    |
| prolonged      | uninhibited   |

Here's a belated thank you to Claudette Mincey (social worker at Boys and Girls HS) and Cynthia Smith (counselor at Boys and Girls) for last month's role-play lesson.

**Get More Teaching Resources at the Youth Communication Website ([www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org))**

- You can order dozens of books and teacher guides on topics your students are interested in.
- 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 download lesson ideas from past issues of "Tips for Teachers."

