



Tips for Teachers

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

December 2008

IN THIS ISSUE

Writing Contest #192— Win \$150!

Deadline: January 5

Question #192: What's the furthest you've ever gone for a friend?

1. Win this Contest! (appeal to the judges)

Remind your students that fellow teens read and judge all the entries. Their essays need to appeal to people just like them (not to teachers, for example).

2. Brainstorming:

On the board, write the word "friend." Ask your students to brainstorm by writing as many words and phrases, descriptions, memories, feelings, etc. as they can in one minute, all in response to hearing the word "friend." Then share out loud, and write responses on the board. Ask the students to look at the board. Do they notice any patterns? Do any groups of words belong together? Does there seem to be some agreement on the nature of friendship?

3. Read the contest question aloud to the class.

4. Freewrite to develop anecdotes:

Encourage your students to write answers to the questions below. (One good way to get them writing is to read the questions aloud as a freewrite, in which each student writes quickly

and privately for 60-90 seconds, stream-of-consciousness, in response to the prompt.)

Their answers will be the raw material for building their essays. The more specific their answers the better. For each of the questions below, *ask your students to tell a brief story, to illustrate what they're saying.* In discussing sacrifice, for example, can they recall a time when they made a specific sacrifice, or refused to make one? Encourage them to tell that story, which will become the heart of their entry.

- Read the following questions aloud, giving 60 seconds for students to freewrite answers to each one: What's your definition of "friend"? Start with, "A friend is...." Keep writing, "A friend is..." as many times as you can, each time giving one more answer.

- Think of a friend who has helped you. What, specifically did the friend say or do? Do they expect the same in return? Do you expect that you and your friends would always do the same things for each other? Why, or why not?

- How important is sacrifice in friendship? Why? Briefly describe a time a friend went out of their way for you. Describe a time you went out of your way for a friend.

- How far is too far to go for a friend?

What's an example of a sacrifice you would not make for a friend? Would you make that sacrifice for family? Why?

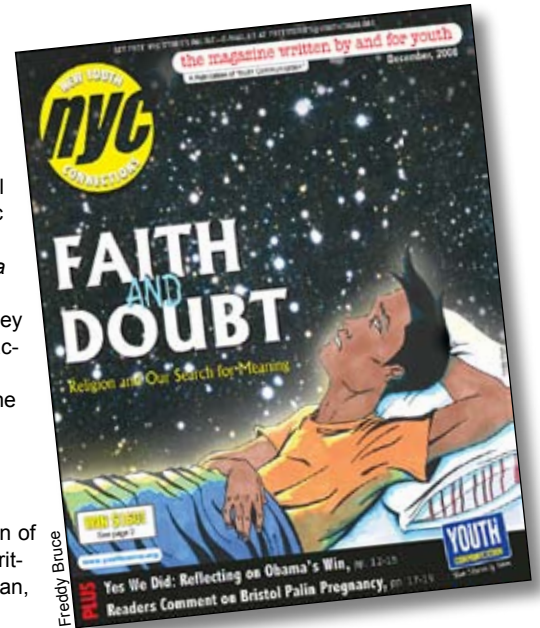
5. The Hook

When students have finished brainstorming (or responding to the freewrite) it's time to talk about assembling all the pieces. Ask them to take a look at the opening line of last month's contest winner (p. 18). How does Angela get your attention right away? How does she make you want to continue reading? No explanation precedes the opening words. It feels like we've been dropped into the middle of a situation we know very little about. But we want to know more: What happened to cause her regret?

Tell the students to look through their notes for the most interesting and most vivid element of their story—an event, a person, a conversation—that will get the reader's attention and make the reader want to know more, to keep reading.

6. Snapshots (bring the anecdotes to life)

Ask the students to volunteer images from



their brainstorming. Make sure they know that images can be made from any combination of the five senses. Elicit the list of senses. Point out that Angela's opening created an "auditory image," a picture made from sound.

When the writers are all ready with an image, ask them to *describe it in detail*, to make sure we can all see it exactly as they see it. ("I can smell spaghetti sauce, and I can see late afternoon sunlight slanting onto the kitchen table. Outside, the sound of birds chirping. Mom is standing in front of the stove in her apron, stirring the sauce.")

Writing Contest #193— Win \$150!

Deadline: February 16, 2009

Contest question #193: Write a letter to your parents telling them what's going on in your life that they should know about—but don't.

1. Introduction: Note: This is one of the most popular contests. It's a great way to get kids writing—especially students who are often resistant to writing.

Tell your group that they have chance to win cash prizes for submitting contest entries.

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.

For more information, contact:

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Tips for Teachers is also available on our website at:

www.youthcomm.org

Tell them that many of the letters for this contest reveal private information so the essays will be published anonymously, and we'll change details to conceal the writer's identity. The winners' names will be chosen at random from all the entries, not just the ones we publish.

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.)

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.)

2. Warm-up discussion: Why don't we tell our parents everything? Ask your students, "What are some reasons for NOT telling your parents everything that's going on in your life?" (Possible answers might include "to stay out of trouble," "because they wouldn't understand," "I need privacy," "I don't know what I want yet," "I don't know how to say it right.")

Ask them, "What things in general are teens reluctant to tell their parents?"

List their answers on the board.

3. List of secrets: Next, ask them to list on a piece of paper as many "secret" things as they can, while assuring them that nobody will see any of the items except the one they finally choose to write about. You might want to list some of your own "secrets" you kept from your parents when you were a teenager (sneaking out at night, seeing the boy/girl they told you not to see, discovering your sexual orientation, dreaming of a career that no one thought you could have, wanting to change your name, etc.).

4. Choose one to write about: Now, they look

at the list, and choose the one item that gets to them the most. And for that one they should ask, "Why don't your parents know this? What stops you from telling them? Why SHOULD your parents know this? Have you kept it from them for their sake, or for your sake? Would it comfort you, in an ideal world, to have them know? Why? Do you need their help, their protection or advice, or do you need them to step aside and let you be?"

Maybe the scariest one isn't the one the parents should know about, not right now. In that case, they can move along the list until they reach something that feels right. In either case, when they answer the above questions, they'll have the core of their letters.

5. First sentences to get them going: It might also help to give them some first sentence ideas. Here is a list 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 you all my life.
- I guess I'd like to think that I tell you everything, but...

Discussion and Group Activity Faith and Death

Talking to the Ceiling, by Percy Lujan, p. 3

1. Before the activity: Before the class, write down each "Starter Question" listed below on a separate piece of paper or index card. You will need a blackboard and chalk.

2. Introduce the activity: Tell your group they are going to read a story about a teen who



Yong Han Chen

thinks about the connection between religion and death. You will also ask the group to write the author a letter that might be published in the next issue of *New Youth Connections* magazine.

3. Read aloud from one passage to get them interested: Hand out the issue and ask them to turn to page 3. Read aloud the passage that starts with "When I arrived..." in the fourth column, and ends with "I went to the living room to sit with the woman."

Ask the class what about this passage stands out. Call their attention to the powerful, specific description of the dying man. Ask them why Percy provides such a detailed description. What do the details make them feel? What does putting these details into the story reveal about Percy: Is he compassionate? Fearful? Morbid?

4. Group work, reading, and discussion: Divide the class into four groups. (Note: They will be reading the story in the group so include one stronger reader in each group.) Ask them to choose one of the following question papers from a box or hat. (Before the class, cut up the questions and put them in the hat. You can use two copies of some questions if you have more than four groups.)

Tell your groups to read the story aloud and then choose a group leader to take notes for a discussion. They are to list as many answers and explanations of answers as they can generate in 15 minutes. All answers must be supported by an example from the article or from life. There must be at least one example drawn from the article for each group.

5. Present results: Groups take turns presenting the results, with each member giving at least one answer-with-example to the whole class. The class asks follow-up questions requesting more details, and makes connections to their own presentations and their own lives. You can map this on the board. Write short notes with the issues and examples from each group; then draw lines where the class has noted connections. At the end, you'll have filled the board with connections.

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.

6. Write a letter to Percy: Do you agree with his attitudes about death and religion? What do you think about his witnessing someone's death? Have you ever felt the same emotions he describes about religion?

Starter Questions

A. Why do you think Percy thinks about death when he thinks about religion? What do you think about the connections between religion and death?

B. How can a person believe something is true yet have feelings that maybe it isn't true? Do you think Percy will someday change his mind and believe in God? Do you think he's confused? What is an issue or belief that you have been confused about?

C. How does Percy's view of death and the role of death in the world differ from some religious believers? How is it similar or how does it differ from your own views?

D. What does Percy think about the beliefs of religious people? Is it right for him to comfort people by saying things that he maybe doesn't believe in? Have you ever told somebody something that you didn't really believe in order to make him or her feel better? Was it right to do that? Why or why not?

Letter Writing Activity
Understanding Others

Wearing My Faith, by Orruba Almansouri, p. 5

Introduction: Tell your group they are going to read a story by Orruba, a Muslim girl who wears a hijab. Ask them if they know what a hijab is. Tell them that many religions expect their adherents to wear certain clothes and point out that the story on page 12 "Alone with the Mountain," is written by an Orthodox Jewish girl who was told how to dress.

1. Before reading the story: Ask your students what outward signs of religious faith they have noticed: yarmulkes, crosses, Sunday clothes, turbans, ashes on forehead for Ash Wednesday, Hasidic Jewish men's black hats and coats, Muslim men's beards, etc. Ask students to list other prominent signs of belonging or loyalty: gang beads, fitted baseball hats, wedding rings, chains, Jordan sneakers, Nike swooshes, tattoos, national flags, etc. What does each represent? Do your students wear anything that represents their bond to a group or belief?

2. Read the article aloud: Asking the students to stop you when they notice evidence of the author's tolerance for other people's beliefs. Ask the class if they have ever felt intolerant towards someone else's difference, or if some-



Terrence Taylor

one has been intolerant of them.

• What do they think of her outward show of faith?

3. Ask your students to write a letter to Orruba: What do they admire about her commitment to her faith? Can they identify with her? Can they tell her a story about their own uniqueness under scrutiny? Do they have any questions for her: Why does she go as far as she does? Wouldn't it be okay with just a token representation of faith? Why aren't Muslim boys clothed like she is? Does she think female beauty is a distraction in this country?

Reading and Writing Lesson
Metaphor, Simile, Personification

Alone With the Mountain, by Marci Bayer, p. 8

Before the activity: Write the quotes from the poets Ezra Pound and Robert Burns (below) on the board.

1. Introduction: Tell your group there are two parts to this activity. In the first one they will examine how Marci used sensory details, metaphors, similes and personification in her story.

The second part of the lesson asks them to read an article about a "turning point" and then write about an important moment in their own lives.

2. Read aloud to notice senses & description: Read the eight paragraphs that begin, "As everyone loaded heavy packs..." and ends with "...curved inward like a wave," (p. 9, columns 1 and 2)

Ask your group to identify all the sensory images in this passage. (This small section presents tastes, smells, temperature and sights. Name the five senses. What senses are not included here? Why do writers use sensory details to describe their experiences to readers?)

3. Identify simile, metaphor, personification:

Ask the group how they react to the sentence: "The desert was flat and dry." (You are looking for them to say "Big deal" or "What else is new?") Then ask them to react to "The desert was like a dry ocean." What is their reaction? Ask them if they have ever seen a real desert.

How many have seen a picture of one or movie scenes set in deserts? What are the similarities between an ocean view and a desert view? (Vast, shimmering on a sunny day, rippling, seemingly endless, welcoming, lonely, etc.). Is "The desert was like a dry ocean" a metaphor or a simile? Explain the difference. (It's a simile because it uses the word "like.") Point out the Ezra Pound quote from the poem "Cino":

I will sing of the white birds
In the blue waters of heaven
The clouds that are spray to its sea.

What things are being compared here?
Does the sky ever look like the ocean? Do clouds ever look like sea spray?

Notice the personification of the desert sky as lonely and patient, taking on human characteristics. This is another powerful way to give a reader your experience of something, the "personality" of the situation. Here is an example

of simile from the song "A Red, Red Rose" by Robert Burns:

O my Love's like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June.
O my Love's like the melody,
That's sweetly play'd in tune.

Turning Point Essay

Ask your students to think of an experience that was a turning point in their lives, towards better or worse. They're to describe it using so much sensory detail and such vivid, unexpected similes that they make the reader connect with them, mind to mind.

Tell them to paint pictures with words, make the reader taste, touch, smell, hear and see what we experience. If they can relate their perception to something the reader already knows (through simile or metaphor or personification), they'll make a mind-to-mind connection.

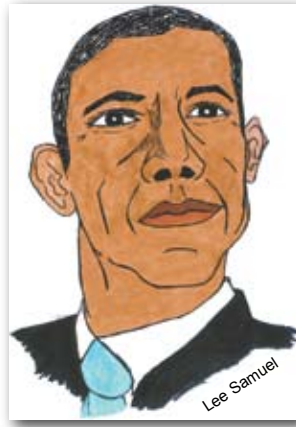
• Just before they start, read the final paragraph of the article aloud. Note the sentence, "Everybody has their own way of seeing what's in the universe." Point out that by writing so vividly and in such detail, Marci has made us appreciate her way of seeing. Your students can do the same.

Vocabulary Party

Rejecting My Religion, by Anonymous, p. 6

1. Preparation: Write the vocabulary words and phrases from this story (below) on separate pieces of paper. Write matching definitions on another piece of paper. Have students line up, backs to you. Tape one paper to each student's back. Some get words; others get definitions. (Note: If you don't use all the words, make sure not to use definitions for words that you don't use.)

2. Meet people, learn new words: Tell them they're at a party. They can have music, dancing, games, anything they come up with (and that you can abide), as long as they adhere to the main goal: *learning new words by meeting people*. They learn by trying to find their sole true partner, who carries either a word or a definition that matches their own. To do this, they have to go around asking yes or no questions



about what is stuck to their own back. Only yes or no questions! This strengthens strategies of inquiry.

Students may use dictionaries, when they're ready, to help someone else, or to find a definition to help themselves, or to help another person so that that person can correctly figure out his or her word and the two of you can get together.

When they've found their partner, they go around helping other people find each other. By this time, most people will have encountered all the words and definitions. But for review, ask each pair to introduce themselves to the rest, and use themselves in a sentence.

When this activity is over, read the article aloud. Ask if there were any surprises, as far as using the new words is concerned. Note that in the article, the author's quest is one for learning. He says, "All I wanted to do was learn."

Has learning ever felt risky to any of your students? What risk did they have to take in the pre-reading activity, in order to learn? How did this relate to risks they take in their daily lives? What's the biggest risk they've ever taken? What did they want? What did they stand to lose? What happened? This can become a personal essay, or a letter to the author.

Words and Phrases Definitions

- Perpetual=Continuing forever
- Adorned=Decorated
- Instilled a fear=Made someone very scared
- Premier=First in rank or position
- Ritual=Ceremony
- Petty=Having little importance
- Adapt=Adjust or make fit
- Expansive=Increasing the volume or amount
- Omnipotent being=All powerful entity
- Hypocrisy=Pretending to be what you are not
- Epic=Heroic
- Segregated=Set apart from others
- Justified=Shown to be right, just or reasonable
- Inferior=Of less importance or quality
- Insecurities=Lack of confidence
- Scripture=A collection of sacred writings

Election Response Treasure Hunt

Yes We Did: Obama's Historic Win, various authors, p. 12-15

Before the lesson: Copy the items in the list below on the blackboard.

Set up the treasure hunt

- Divide class into a few groups of three to four.
- Give each group a single copy of the issue.
- Tell them they're going to have a treasure-hunt competition. Each group will race against the others to find the items listed below.
- The catch? Only one copy of the issue per group. They need to come up with cooperative strategies for sharing the information and finding answers in a nonlinear way.
- Tally the totals after 15 minutes. Have each group read their finds aloud and compare them to other groups, to achieve total coverage for the class.

Find These Items

- Who stood and waited to vote with her grandmothers?
- Who liked Obama because he wears North Face?
- Who came back home to New York to vote?
- Who worried about assassination?
- Which neutral journalist was overcome by emotion?
- Who used a metaphor about caged birds?
- Whose mother took a picture of her at the voting booth?
- Who was surrounded by McCain supporters at her school?
- Who was worried about high expectations?
- Who watched the election on the Al Jazeera network?
- Whose father promised to hand out free food?
- Who says we should rethink the word "minority"?
- Who chatted on the computer with friends in England and Australia?

Rules for Life (Reflection Activity)

Following My Own Commandments, by Tashiana Garrido, p. 23

1. Have students read the article (individually or aloud).

2. Form groups; generate commandments: After reading the article, ask students to form groups of 3-5 people. Each group must generate its own list of commandments. Everyone in the group must agree with the commandments. Negotiation is significant here. Unless, of course, they want to defer to a single, dominant authority. These are rules they all want to live by, and try to live by.

3. Easier said than done? Discussion & Writing: Ask the teens if they have ever broken their own rules? Have a brief discussion. Then ask each student to write a brief description either of how they've adhered to the group's rules despite temptation or have broken a rule. How do they feel about the task of staying on task? Is there guilt when they fail to follow a rule they think is important?

4. Submit your commandments! Collect each group's list of commandments and send them to Tashiana. (We may publish them if we have space.)

Regents Prep

Understanding Graphs

Here are some questions you can ask students to help them become more comfortable with graphs and timelines (see p. 6).

What is the largest major religious group in New York? (Catholic)

What is smallest? (Orthodox Christian)

What is the largest major religious group in the world, according to the pie chart? (Muslim)

What is the smallest? (Jewish)

Are there more Christians or Muslims in the world? (This is a tougher question: Student must add all the Christian groups together. They come to 34.3%, compared to 21% for Muslims. (Note that Muslims are not divided into the three main sects, Shi'a, Sunni & Sufism.) Explain to students that sometimes on the Regents or other tests they will be asked to make this kind of conceptual leap.

Which three major religions predate Christianity?