



Tips for Teachers

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

December 2004

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Dating/Relationships

In "Wonderful Love," Anna Yakir describes how happy she is to have a boyfriend, Israel, who she's really in love with. She likes everything about him: his looks, how he treats her, and the physical side of their relationship. But she's also plagued by typical doubts: How to deal with jealousy? Should she spend more time with her friends? Will he cheat on her? Is it right to be having sex before marriage? Would he love her if they weren't having sex?

Lesson: Write a letter to Anna

Goal: Have students vicariously explore the questions that Anna is wrestling with to help them deal thoughtfully with love and sex in their own lives.

—Have your students read Anna's story for homework, or read it out loud in class.

—Ask students to circle at least 5

sentences or paragraphs that stand out for them.

—Ask students to pick one of the items they've underlined and write a paragraph about why it stands out for them.

—Go around the room, asking students to read their paragraphs. Let other students comment on what the person has read. (The goal is to get a conversation going, for example, on whether she should feel like a "slut" or should be happy that she's having sex in the context of a loving relationship, or whether it's right for her to neglect her friends, or whether she should even be thinking of marriage at age 17.)

Write a letter to Anna

Each student should imagine that she's Anna's best friend, and Anna has told her about this wonderful relationship, and about her doubts. They should write a letter to Anna. They can give her advice, ask her questions, or share their own experiences as a way of helping Anna understand what she's going through and make the best decisions about this relationship. (Please send the best letters to us for publication.)

Drugs

In "Mary Jane's No Friend of Mine," Anonymous describes two bad



experiences with smoking pot. (Note: You may have to point out to your students that Mary Jane is an old slang expression for pot.)

Point out to your students that marijuana is sometimes called a "gateway" drug which gets people used to getting high and ultimately entices them to try "harder" drugs like cocaine. However, it has the opposite impact on the author, leading her to swear off all illegal drug use.

Lesson: Discuss the writer's reaction to smoking pot.

Goal: Explore her reasoning and the impact of her decision.

(Note: There are many ideas about the best way to talk about drugs with teens. In this case, a peer has

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written a strong story about the negative impact of smoking pot. Even if you feel the urge to tell your students that smoking is bad or wrong (a tactic that makes adults feel good but usually has little impact) this story gives you a chance to avoid that trap. The experience of the teen who wrote the story is a strong argument against using pot. Because she's already conveyed the message, you are free to be non-judgmental. By merely leading a discussion with the story the predominant message will be that using illegal drugs can be harmful—and it will come from a peer, a much more credible source than an adult.)

Questions you can use to spark a discussion:

—Why does A. (Anonymous) change her resolve to never try mari-



juana? What reasons does she give? —What do your students think of A.'s sister? What do they think of the two guys who supply her with her first

joint? Why didn't A. ask her sister or her boyfriend, both users, to help her try the drug?

—What is A.'s initial reaction to the drug? (See the two paragraphs below the subhead "Heart Beat Too Fast, Too Loud.")

—A. describes serious physical and emotional reactions after her initial euphoria. Why does her friend Jerry refuse to call 911 after he realizes that A. might be in danger?

—A. doesn't tell us how her mother reacted when she found out about A.'s misadventure. What do your students think the mother—who is termed "overprotective" in the story—said to A.? How would your students' parents react if they found out their kids had gotten high?

—Why does A. try smoking again, breaking her promise to her mother and friends? Do your students think she learned her lesson after the second try or will she try again some day?

—What advice do your students have for A.?

Role plays

—One student plays A.'s boyfriend who in the story gets A. to try marijuana one more time. One student plays A and must say no based on her experiences in the story. The "boyfriend" must counter her refusal.

—A student playing A. tells her sister that she is concerned about her smoking pot. The sister justifies her action. A. tries to dissuade the sister, based on her experiences.

Get your students published:

Have your students write a letter to the editor about their reactions to this story. What do they think about A's decision to try pot, and then to try it again? What advice do they have for A. now?

Writing Contest

Page 2, \$175 in Prizes. This issue's contest prompt is:

"If you had a chance to relive one day, which one would it be and why?"

Pre-writing discussion: You won't need to prompt your students too much with this question. Most people can readily identify bad days they would like to redeem or good days they would like to relive or make even better.

One quick way to get started: Have your students make two columns on a sheet of paper. Label one column "Good Days" and one column "Bad Days." Ask them to list and briefly explain at least three days under each heading. Tell them to review the topics they listed. Which ones bring back the most vivid memories? The best scenes? The strongest emotions? Ask them to select one topic, and do a pre-write: list three scenes (things that

happened that day) and three emotions they felt. Finally, ask them to write a sentence or two about how they feel about the day now, looking back. This should be plenty of material to get them going.

Another possible twist:

Encourage your students to pick a day in which *they made a decision* which made the day great or horrible. What was the decision? Why did they make it? Did it have the effect they expected? Were there "unintended consequences"? How did they respond? Did their response make things better or worse? If they could replay the day, would they make different decisions? Why or why not?

Deadline: December 27, 2004

(Remember to send class sets before school lets out for the holidays.)



Martell Brown

Writing About Food

This issue has several interesting stories about food. As Stephanie Hinkson writes in her introduction (p. 4), food plays an important role in cultural traditions, and cooking can be a source of creativity and family bonding. Food can be a source of health problems, like anorexia or obesity.

From a teaching standpoint, the great thing about food is that everyone has important experiences related to it. And those experiences often reveal personality and culture in interesting ways.

Lesson: Write About Food

Goal: Students will learn to use several writing elements (scene, dialogue, description, dramatic tension, and reflection) to build a story.

Tell your students that they have to write a short essay about food. (Decide the length based on your goals. It could be as short as a 5 paragraph essay, or as long as a short story.)

1) *Brainstorming:* Have students list memories of food. Prompt them to list experiences like a memorable family dinner, preparing or making food, eating out, a food fight, shopping for food, not having enough food, cafeteria food, holidays, birthdays, etc. Lead a group discussion in which students tell the class about

experiences they've had to get the creative juices flowing, but tell the students that they must each make their own list, inspired by the discussion but based on their own experiences.

2) *Briefly review the elements of a story:* dramatic tension, scene, dialogue, description, reflection.

3) *Read a model story to see how it works:* Read aloud, "Cooking for Mami," by Dayan Perez, p. 4. Tell the students that they should circle at least one example of each of the four elements of a story. [Note: The *dramatic tension* revolves around the mother not believing that the daughter can prepare a meal for her customers on her own, and then she has to do it. Will she succeed? A good *scene* is when Dayan is adding beef to the frying pan and it sizzles. Dayan *describes* the kinds of ingredients found in her mom's kitchen. Dayan uses *dialogue* throughout the story, e.g., "You cooked? But you don't know how to cook!" And, though Dayan becomes a good cook, she *reflects* that being her mother's maid soon turns cooking into a chore.]

4) *Select a story:* Tell your students to look at their list of food experi-

ences. Which ones have a dramatic tension? (For example, the holiday dinner in which warring relatives must get along has more tension than another day of bad food in the cafeteria.) For which experiences can they remember good scenes and dialogue? Which lend themselves to the best description?

5) *Write the story:* Students often feel most comfortable if they have a model for their story. Remind them that most stories have a beginning which orients the reader, a middle where most of the action takes place, and an end which wraps things up. In Dayan's story, the beginning is the first eight paragraphs, where we learn that Dayan's mother has a mini-restaurant in her house, and Dayan helps out. The middle begins with the day that her mother had a doctor's appointment, and Dayan learns that she will have the chance to show her stuff (or totally screw up, depending on how things go). Dayan's description of cooking and serving the meal while her mom is gone is the middle. The end is the last two paragraphs, where Dayan reflects on how cooking changes once she's expected to be responsible instead of just helping out.

Tell your students they can model their story on the same beginning/middle/end format that Dayan used. One approach is to have them write the elements of the story without worrying about where they'll go. For example, they would write three scenes, with the appropriate dialogue. They could describe the taste of the food, or other relevant details. They could write some reflections. Then, when they have a lot of the elements, they can put all the beginning material together, all the middle material together, and the end material together. Then they can put those pieces in order and write transitions. And fill in missing material, or ideas they hadn't thought of. Before they know it, they'll have a real essay.



Food Diaries

Three students who wrote for this issue, Hattie Rice, Pauline Gordon, and Natasha Santos, had their interest in eating more nutritious food piqued by keeping food diaries for a week. (We were surprised to see that it is possible to survive on Twix candy bars.) Here is a sample from one student's daily diary:

Breakfast: None

Lunch: None

Dinner: None

Snacks during day: Cheese doodles, potato chips, chocolate and vanilla cookies, Sprite, Coke

Comments: Feeling hungry, empty and tired. Think I'll go to bed now.

The students read their diaries aloud and talk with their peers about their food choices. They get suggestions for how they could improve their diet. For example, is there one food they would like to stop eating but can't? They also talk about their feelings about food and eating.

To be most effective, this activity



John Gaston

needs to be integrated into a larger set of lessons in which students learn to read food labels, learn about balanced diets, etc. For example, over the course of several weeks we had students talk about any concerns they have about food, nutrition, their weight, etc., and write about their emotional connections to food. They

reviewed their food diaries and discussed what they'd like to change, and the barriers to change. They spent one session shopping and then cooking nutritious food. They investigated the food choices in their neighborhood. For each student, the experience had a major impact on how they think about food and what they eat. Here are three of the stories they wrote:

"Eating Healthy's Hard in My Home," by Pauline Gordon, p. 11

"A Farm Grows in Brooklyn," by Natasha Santos, p. 15

"Dangerously in Love With a Danish," by Hattie Rice, p. 5.

Teens suffer from a wide range of food-related problems, including obesity, anorexia, and an over-reliance on junk food. Many live in neighborhoods with relatively few good choices, or in families that eat poorly because of tradition, lack of money, or lack of easily-available good food. These problems will not be solved overnight, but reading and discussing these stories, coupled with activities like keeping food diaries and learning how to read nutrition labels, is a start.

Attention Health Teachers: Clip and Save

This issue is filled with stories that relate to topics you'll teach during the year. Clip and save the stories to use when you reach the appropriate place in your curriculum.

Pot Smoking

"Mary Jane Is Not Friend of Mine," p. 3

Food Addiction (Humor With a Point)

"Dangerously in Love With a Danish" by Hattie Rice p. 5

Anorexia

"Starving for Acceptance," p. 6

Cafeteria Food

"Standing Up to the Styrofoam Tray Rebellion," p. 8

Obesity

"Are Teens Getting Too Fat?," p. 10

Family Pressuring and Food

"Eating Healthy's Hard Work in My Home," p. 11

Growing Food

"Class Garden Means Business," and "A Farm Grows in Brooklyn," p. 15

Physical Education

"Gym Makes Me Run," and "What's the Point of Gym?" p. 16

Fast Food

"Super Size Me," p. 23

Cooking

"Cooking for Mami," p. 4 and "I Can Cook, You Can Cook," p. 24