



Tips for Teachers

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

December 2005

Teens and Money

STORY: "My Father's Dream or Mine," by Desiree Bailey, p. 3

ISSUE #1: PARENT/CHILD CONFLICT

Desiree's father opposes her plans to become an anthropologist because the profession doesn't pay enough. She begins to doubt her interest in the field, feels guilt about defying and disappointing her parents, and thinks she's selfish for pursuing her own dreams. She finally opens up to her mother, who urges her to follow her own interests.

Discussion questions: Your students' experiences: Desiree and her parents resolve their differences smoothly and productively. Ask your students to recall an important conflict they've had with their parents or guardians. What was it over? Did they feel the same doubts and misgivings that Desiree did? How was it resolved? Did they try to talk to their parents about the issue like the author did? Did they ask for advice from a sibling or someone outside the family? What did they learn from this story about child-parent conflicts?

- Facing up to conflict: It takes Desiree

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:
Youth Communication
224 W. 29th St., 2nd fl.,
New York, NY 10001
212-279-0708 ext.100

awhile to talk to her parents about her feelings but once she does she's surprised to discover that her mother supports her. Opening up to her parents also helps her clarify her thinking and understand her father's point of view better. What do your students think would have happened if Desiree shied away from dealing with her issues in the open, forthright way she finally did? Is it always advisable to be open about what you want with people who might oppose you? Did talking with the school counselor make it easier for the author to talk with her mother?

ISSUE #2: CAREER CHOICES AND MONEY

Toward the beginning of the same story, Desiree describes how she's been interested in several career paths before deciding on anthropology. At the end of the story she still wants to be an anthropologist but the "decision is far from final." Do your students have any career plans? Where did they get their ideas from: TV, their parents or other adults, peers? Have they changed their minds about these options? What attracts them to those jobs? Do they think that Desiree made too big a deal about her career choice struggles while she was still in high school? Or is it good to be planning ahead in this way?

Her father disagrees with her choices because he doesn't think anthropology will lead to financial security. Your group may not know how much money certain professionals make. Here is a list of national average starting salaries for people who graduate with certain bachelors' degrees. Write these professions on the board (without the salaries) and ask students which ones they are interested in. Then



write the average starting salaries next to them and ask students if that information changes their thinking. Why or why not? (Note: Students may be used to hearing pay in hourly rates. You can point out to them that \$25,000 a year is about \$12.50 an hour; \$36,000 is \$18 an hour; \$42,000 is \$21 an hour. You can also point out that these national averages vary a lot. A starting elementary school teacher in New York now makes about \$39,000 a year, for example.)

Accounting.....	\$42,000
Civil Engineering.....	\$41,000
Computer Science.....	\$49,000
Economics/Finance.....	\$41,000
Business Administration.....	\$37,000
Marketing.....	\$36,000
Psychology.....	\$25,000
Elementary school teacher.....	\$27,000
High school teacher.....	\$39,000
Registered Nurse.....	\$39,000
Liberal Arts (anthropology, sociology, etc.).....	\$30,000

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



FASHION SECTION

Our writers thought it would be fun to look back at some teen fashion trends from the past 20 years or so. (pages 6-9). There are stories about sneakers, jeans, hair dyeing, body piercing, and more.

STORY: Labels R Us(?): “Why Do We Love Labels?” by Patricia Rogers, p. 22

Before they read the fashion section have them look at Patricia Roger’s analysis of why some young people spend a lot of money to be in fashion while ridiculing those who can’t or won’t follow their lead.

One way to interest your group in reading this story is for you to read out loud some of the more interesting lines from the piece. You can use some of quotes to start a discussion before or after they read the piece. Here are some suggestions.

“Look at those Shaqs! Here’s 99 cents—go buy me a pair.”

“High school is all about image.”

“The hot new jeans brand in my Bronx neighborhood is 7 for all Mankind.”

“Wearing labels gives them an identity that they can’t find within themselves.”

“Sometimes I saw those girls crying at school after being teased, feeling bad about themselves.”

Writing idea: Write on the board: “True or False: Wearing labels gives them an identity that they can’t find within themselves.” Tell the class that this is the opinion of one of the

Writing Contest

page 2

Deadline: January 2, 2006

“What is the biggest obstacle you’ve faced? How did you overcome it and what did you learn from it?”

Pre-writing group work for writing contest

Give your students the definition of obstacle: “something that impedes progress or achievement.” Start a discussion with your students about their goals. Write some of them on the board. Then ask them about what obstacles might get in the way of these goals. What could prevent someone from graduating from high school, getting into the college of their choice, building good friendships, dating someone, buying something, being liked by peers, etc?

Then ask them to write about a time in their lives when they had to struggle with someone or some condition (for example, not having enough money, a health problem, feelings of low self-worth, failing a class) or some institution (a crowded school) to try to get what they wanted. Mention that they needn’t have overcome the obstacle to write about their experience. Sometimes the most interesting stories—in fact most great literature—deal with failures to overcome obstacles. If you are an English teacher you can refer to just about any book or play you are reading in your class as an example.

One concept that we find help-

ful in working with students at Youth Communication is “persistence in the face of adversity.” Many of our students, like yours, come from very difficult circumstances—which are unlikely to change. The biggest challenge for them—and a quality that we deeply admire in them—is their persistence: staying in school; avoiding early pregnancy; helping younger siblings. This stubborn persistence is the quality that will help them most in their lives. But it often goes unrecognized. If you recognize it your students will be very appreciative. We’re happy to have students write about overcoming a major obstacle, but we’re just as interested in a description of persistence in the face of adversity.

Before they start writing their entry, urge your students to make a simple outline or some lists to help organize their thoughts. What is the obstacle? Who are the people involved? Describe the circumstances. What events took place as they tried to get what they wanted? What decisions did they make as part of this process? List the positive results of their struggle and the bad feelings it may have caused. Did they learn anything that they can describe in one sentence?

Classroom & Advisory Resources from Youth Communication

Youth Communication has published over 70 books and booklets written by teens. Each one is an anthology of the best stories from our magazines on topics like conflict resolution, food and nutrition, friendship, parents, gender issues, identity, resilience, and others.

These anthologies inspire teens to read and help teachers start discussions and improve their students’ writing skills. Visit our E-store at www.youthcomm.org. Or you can get our catalog by calling Loretta Chan at 212-279-0708 extension 115.

teen writers. In a short essay, they will have to defend or attack that statement.

Pre-write: Ask the students a series of questions to get them thinking. 1) Ask them to list different “styles” they are aware of (thug, prep, metal, etc.). Then, ask them to pick a style as different from their own as possible, and to imagine that they had to dress in that style for an entire semester. Would anything about them change? (friends, feelings, self-image, etc.). Have them write a paragraph imagining the impact of this experience. 2) Ask student to imagine that for an entire semester they could only wear clothes with no labels. Again, what, if anything, would change about them? Have them write another paragraph. 3) Ask students to list three aspects of their lives which have a major influence on how they think about themselves. You can give them a list of possibilities: family, friends, religion, clothes, racial or ethnic group, athletic ability, musicality, school performance or others. Have them describe one experience they’ve had in the last year which illustrates why this part of their lives is so important to them.

Your students should now have plenty of material for defending or attacking the statement above. Have them write a one page essay.



STORIES: “I’m Pierced, Therefore I Am,” by Wunika Hicks, p. 8 and “A One Man Rainbow Coalition,” by Lenny Jones, p. 9

Wunika Hicks’ 1997 story is about getting her navel and tongue pierced. The rage for piercing continues—at least among some young people. Here are some discussion prompts:

—What do your students think about Wunika choosing body piercing as an expression of her individuality and freedom to express herself?

—Why do they think she got her navel pierced (her first body piercing)? (Her answers: new friends at college had it and she thought



it looked cute, she woke up one morning and said, “I’m going to get my navel pierced.”)

—Did she have doubts or second thoughts? (She was “shaking in her pants,” and “couldn’t believe I was going through with it”)

—Why did she go ahead with it? (“I had made up my mind...besides, my friends were there watching me.”)

—Did she have any regrets afterwards? (Didn’t seem that way. “I wore short shirts every chance I got.”) (Note: Today Wunika is on the job market and she shows a lot less metal than she did back then.)

—Why was getting her navel pierced a “rite of passage?” (It was a way for her to express that “I belong in my body, that it’s mine to do what I want to.”)

—Why did she get more piercings? (She doesn’t say exactly, other than she wanted more, but encourage your students to talk about what motivated her—aesthetics, making a statement, etc.)

—Do they agree with Wunika’s theories about why her body piercings seem to upset other people?

Lenny Jones is self-conscious about the size of his head (p. 9) and dyes his hair to make his head look different. He tries several colors, gets many different reactions, and has humorous experiences with the dyeing process. In the end, though he’s pleased and says that he probably won’t ever stick to cone consistent look. To him, looking “normal” is boring.

—Have your students compare Lenny and Wunika. If they were going to change their look and assert their individuality, would they be more likely to go the piercing route or the dyeing route? Or do they have other ideas?

STORY: “Money Can’t Buy Love,” by Lily Mai, p. 11

ISSUE: WHAT DO PARENTS AND TEENS OWE EACH OTHER?

What’s more important: economic security or time with family? When she’s younger, Lily’s parents are poor and work like dogs to improve their situation, but Lily is raised by loving grandparents. However, when her parents save enough money to achieve the American dream of their own house, the love and attention that Lily got from her grandparents is replaced with material things. She’s happy to have her own room and a TV, but very unhappy about missing her grandparents and never seeing her parents, who work all the time to support their new life-style. This raises interesting questions for your students to wrestle with:

—When do they think Lily was better off—when she was poor or after she moved? Why?

—When Lily visits China with her parents she sees horrible poverty and realizes why her parents work so hard. But she also sees the good relationships that her parents have with their parents. Again, which do your students think is better: No money and close family? Or prosperity and lack of closeness with family?

—If your students had to choose between economic success and a close family, which would they choose? Why? Lily’s parents have had to sacrifice free time with their daughter to achieve economic success. Is it worth it? Why or why not?

—If Lily’s parents said that all of their sacrifices are for their daughter, would you agree?

—Is Lily being ungrateful?

—What advice would they give to Lily? To her parents?



STORY: "How the Other Half Lives," by Natasha Santos, p. 15

ISSUE: CITY POVERTY VS. SUBURBAN WEALTH

Natasha lives in Brownsville, one of the toughest neighborhoods in New York. A visit to a high school in Norwalk, Connecticut poses hard questions for her and makes her confront stereotypes about herself and her wealthier peers.

Natasha ends her story saying she feels more hopeful "that success comes from a mixture of things—not just where you're from and how society views you, but also what you think and who you are and how much you work for it." She thinks that she'll be the "exception," who

will achieve despite her impoverished background.

—What do your students think about Natasha's story? What stands out for them? What surprises them? What angers them? What inspires them?

—The kids in Norwalk feel tremendous pressure to achieve in school. Taking personal responsibility for their achievement is very important. What do your students think about this intense focus on academic success?

—Some of the Norwalk kids think some black kids hold themselves back by blaming outside factors instead of just getting down to work. What do your students think of that attitude?

—Is it fair that someone like Natasha has

to be an "exception" to succeed, while success of the kind she's talking about is probably the rule for kids from Norwalk?

—Can or should anything be done to level the playing field? Or is it up to each individual in Bushwick to try to become "the exception."

Natasha is trying to figure out why there are such huge discrepancies between her neighborhood and the one in Connecticut. She focuses on immediately observable characteristics. If you discuss this story with your students, you may also want to point out some of the larger historical forces that helped create the gap between Brownsville and Norwalk. For example:

—The suburbs boomed after World War II because of changes that made it much easier to get mortgages. However, the mortgage markets and the housing markets were deliberately discriminatory. Virtually all of the new, federally insured mortgages went to whites. The large suburban developments, like Levittown on Long Island, had deed restrictions that prohibited blacks from moving in. And, while banks were directing huge amounts of money to the segregated suburbs, they were "redlining" the cities: refusing to make loans to blacks who lived there to improve their properties.

—Educational opportunities exploded after WWII, thanks largely to the GI Bill, which paid for college and vocational training. But blacks had been systematically kept out of the armed forces so they had much less access to those benefits. The blacks who did serve in the armed forces often found that segregated educational institutions would not accept them, even with GI Bill benefits.

—Many of the other government programs and regulations that lifted white Americans out of poverty during the Depression and later, such as Social Security and minimum wage laws, were effectively designed to exclude African Americans to the greatest extent possible. For example, domestic service and agricultural labor were excluded (by southern legislators) from many of the provisions of those laws to insure that blacks did not benefit from them.

Thus, the differences between Bushwick and Norwalk, or Bushwick and Levittown, are hardly accidental.



Ruda Tillet

News and Announcements

Celebrate Our 25th Anniversary

Youth Communication is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a tribute to the more than 2,000 young people who have contributed to our writing and publishing program. Professional actors will dramatize some of our young people's stories and we will show a short film by award winning filmmaker Ric Burns about the writing process. The show will be at 8 p.m. on Wednesday January 18, 2006, at Symphony Space, Broadway and 95th Street. Tickets are \$50. For information visit our web site at youthcomm.org. (See ad on page 16.)

Illustrators Needed

We are looking for young artists to illustrate our two magazines and get topnotch training from a professional illustrator. See the ad on page 10 for details. Art

College Scholarships for Creative Expression

The Bertelsman Foundation's annual World of Expression contest awards thousands of dollars to New York City public high school students for writing and other creative efforts. See the ad on page 16 for contact information.

A New Youth Communication Book

Free Spirit Press just released an anthology of teen-written stories about peer pressure. The book, *The Courage to Be Yourself*, features 16 stories from New Youth Connections and our other magazine, *Represent: The Voice of Youth in Foster Care*. It's edited by long-time Youth Communication editor Al Desetta. Visit FreeSpirit.org for more about this great resource.