



# Tips for Teachers

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

January-February 2001

## Letters to the Editor, p. 2:

Remind readers that we welcome letters to the editor and publish most of them. They may evolve out of some of the lessons below and can be quite brief.

## Cutting Away the Pain

In "Cutting Away the Pain," p. 2, Melissa Rodriguez describes how loneliness, stress and depression lead her to intentionally cut herself, which gives her a sense of power and relief from her anguish. Melissa hides her destructive habit and feels like a freak, until her mother's revelation that she overcame cutting and visits to a therapist help her get the secret

### A note on the lessons:

The following lessons are designed to promote reflection on the 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, roleplays are suggested for more active learning.

### A note on the role plays:

You will need two or three teens to act out the suggested role plays in front of class. Make sure the young people understand their roles by briefly reviewing the characters in the stories. Each role play participant has to try to convince the other of her point of view. Let the role play 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.

fixation under control.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Cutting helps Melissa feel in control and it relieves her pain. We all feel the need from time to time to resort to harmful habits to relieve stress, such as eating too much or smoking cigarettes. Think of a positive habit you have that has replaced a negative one. What is it, how does it help relieve stress, and why it is better for you than your old habit? If you have not yet been able to kick a negative habit, what positive habits would you like to develop in your life and how could you go about developing them?

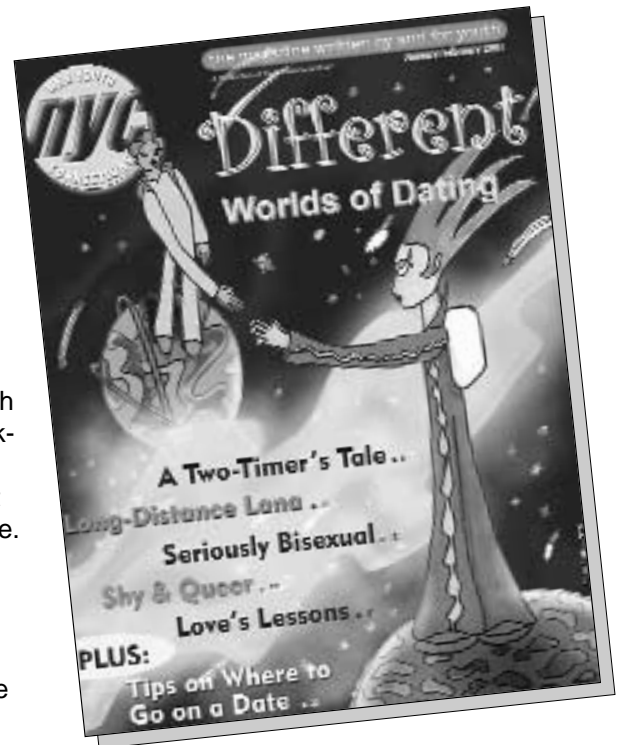
- At the root of Melissa's pain are feelings of hurt and abandonment that no one seems to understand, and cutting herself is a way of avoiding them. What do you think Melissa must do in the future to confront those feelings and deal with them? For example, who might she talk to, and what could she say to them?

- Circle a passage in Melissa's story that you can especially relate to. Why do you relate to this passage? How does it connect to your own experiences?

- Write a short letter to Melissa, telling her what you think of her for writing such a personally revealing story.

### Roleplay:

- Two students, playing Melissa and her friend. Melissa's friend cannot understand why anyone would



intentionally cut herself.

Melissa wants her friend to understand why she does it and that many teens hurt themselves to relieve their pain, although not necessarily by cutting.

## Separated from Family

Abilene Selvon, in "Missing Orian," p. 5, describes how she was separated from her older brother Orian for six years, when she and her family came to the U.S. from Trinidad and he had to remain behind because of immigration problems. The separation causes Abilene a lot of pain, and she feels better when she uses drawing to release her emotions. Orian eventually makes it to the U.S. and the family is reunited.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Have you ever been separated from a family member? Who was the

### Writing contest, p. 3:

Encourage students to enter our writing contest, which offers \$175 in prizes:

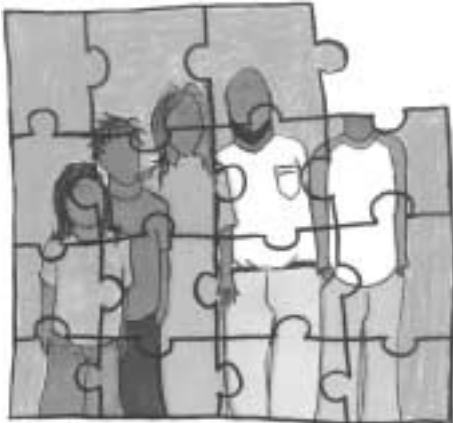
“Write a letter to your parents, telling them what’s going on in your life that they should know about—but don’t.”

You may want to devote part of your class to discussing the topic, before turning to the writing (students do not have to reveal the content of what they plan to write about, which may be too personal, but can instead discuss why parents don’t know what’s going on in their children’s lives and how this affects relations between the two groups).

person, how long was the separation, and how did it affect you?

- Abilene uses drawing to deal with her emotions. What hobbies or activities have you used to deal with difficult emotions? What is it about the hobby or activity that helps you feel better?

- When Abilene and Orian are reunited, they have to adjust to each other all over again. For example, he doesn’t want her to hang out and has specific ideas about who she should date. Have you ever had the experience of not seeing someone for a



long time, and then having to get to know them all over again? What was the experience like? How did your relationship change? Were you able to have the same kind of relationship as you had before? Why or why not?

### Music and Politics

In “Rap Heavyweight Lives On,” p.7, Brant Schwartz reviews the music

of the late Christopher Rios, a.k.a., Big Pun. Some of Big Pun’s music focuses on the injustices suffered by minorities in society, and Brant agrees with his point of view. To back up his point, Brant describes an incident where he was hanging out in a park with mostly Black and Latino friends, and a White cop pulled a gun on them. Brant feels that if he was hanging out with White kids, the cop wouldn’t have pulled his gun.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Brant agrees with Big Pun’s political point of view—that minorities are mistreated in this society—and gives an example from his own life to show why he agrees. What artist do you admire for her political message, and what experiences from your own life lead you to agree with that message?

- Has your view of politics or society ever been changed by an artist’s work? Who was the artist, and how did her work change your point of view?

- What other messages does Brant find in Big Pun’s music? Do you like these other messages, or do you find them offensive or contradictory?

### Music and Emotions

In “There’s More to R. Kelly Than Sex,” p. 7, Stephen Simpson describes R. Kelly’s new album, and, in a particular, a song he can really relate to, called “I Wish,” where Kelly

sings about missing his mother and friend, both of whom have died. For Stephen, the song expresses exactly how he feels about his friend Nick, who passed away a year ago.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Is there a song (or a book, movie, painting, etc.) that expresses or captures exactly how you feel about an experience in your life? Who is the artist, and what experience does she connect with?

- What makes you able to relate to an artist’s work? Does it have to relate directly to experiences in your own life, or are there other factors?

- Make a list of your favorite artists (recording or otherwise) and your favorite work by each. What do these works have in common? For example, do they all deal with similar emotions or experiences? How are they different?



### Two-Timing Guys

In “A Dog’s Tale,” p. 8, Anonymous boasts about how he dated two girls at the same time in his high school. Being a two-timer makes him feel good about himself and helps him gain popularity among his peers. Although he eventually gets caught, he doesn’t regret being a player and would probably do it again. In a side-

bar, "Two Timing's Terrible," Shavone Harris describes her disgust with the writer's behavior.

**Prompts for discussion and/or writing:**

- The writer dates two girls at the same time, gets caught, but doesn't feel bad about it and would do it again. What is your reaction to his attitude?
- At one point the writer says he was only thinking about how good he felt, not about the feelings of the two girls. Was there a time when you thought only of yourself, that you have since come to regret? What was the experience, and why did you change your views toward your behavior?
- Do you think the writer might have a problem he's avoiding? What do you think it is, and how could he face it?
- Is this kind of behavior more common among guys or girls? Defend your position.



**Roleplay:**

- Two students, playing the writer and Shavone Harris, author of "Two Timing's Terrible." The writer defends his two-timing to Shavone. Shavone wants him to understand that what he is doing is wrong.

### Never on Time

Benjamin Berelson, in "Better Late Than Never," p. 10, describes his problem with being on time. If it wasn't for his habitual lateness, he probably would have graduated from high school already. He blames his overly demanding parents and general dis-

satisfaction with his life.

**Prompts for discussion and/or writing:**

- What aspects of his life is Benjamin dissatisfied with? Find as many as you can.
- If Benjamin suddenly had good friends and a girlfriend, do you think he would start being on time? Why or why not?
- Benjamin's lateness is a sign of deeper problems in his life. Write a letter to him, explaining what he might do about these problems in order to feel better about himself (and perhaps stop being late).

**Roleplay:**

- Three students, playing Benjamin, his mother, and father. Benjamin's mother and father want him to know they are fed up with his lateness and to simply grow up and be on time. Benjamin wants them to understand the reasons behind his lateness and how they have partly contributed to it.

### A Bi-Sexual Teen Comes Out

In "Don't Tell Me It's a Phase," p. 12, the anonymous writer describes how she's always been attracted to males and females. Both gay and straight friends (and the writer's father) tell her it's a phase she'll outgrow, but she doesn't think so, although she's

still trying to figure out what kind of relationship is best for her.

**Prompts for discussion and/or writing:**

- Circle a passage in the writer's story that you can relate to. Why does this passage stand out for you?
- Friends tell the writer that her bisexuality is a "phase" that she will "get over." How you ever gone through an experience that was important to you, that people said you would just "get over"? What was the experience, how did the comments

make you feel, and what eventually happened?

- The writer is struggling to find her sexual identity. What aspects of your identity are you struggling to come to terms with? Do you feel supported by friends and family? Why or why not?

**Roleplay:**

- Two students, playing the writer and her father. The writer's father thinks his daughter's bisexuality is just



a phase and that she should just "date more guys." The writer wants her father to know that it's not just a phase, and that she needs his love and support.

### Dating Dilemmas

In "Too Shy to Say 'Hi'" and an accompanying article, "My First (and Only) Date" (p. 13), Eugene Han, who is gay, describes how he is too shy to approach men he finds attractive, and is uncomfortably self-conscious on his first date.

**Prompts for discussion and/or writing:**

- Do you find it hard to approach people you find attractive? Why or why not?
- Write a letter to Eugene, describing what he can do to feel more comfortable about approaching

people and going on dates.

- Describe your best and worst moments in approaching someone. Describe your best and worst dates.

## A Long Distance Relationship

In "Too Far for Love" (p. 18), Jonathan Maseng meets a girl he likes at a summer camp and they try to have a long distance relationship when camp ends (she lives in Chicago, he lives in New York). But the separation is awkward, misunderstandings develop, and even a week-end visit to the Windy City doesn't salvage the relationship.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Have you ever had a long distance relationship? What was the experience like?
- Was Jonathan being realistic in thinking they could have a long distance relationship? Why or why not?
- What could Jonathan and Lana have done to keep it going? What does it take for these kinds of relationships to succeed?
- The star-crossed couple runs into trouble when they communicate by email, rather than in person. How can writing to someone be better than talking in person? What is better about talking in person?

## Relationship Blues

In "Let Down By Liars," p. 17, the anonymous writer describes her failed relationships with two guys. Joey pressures her to have sex and spreads lies about her, until she breaks up with him. Gene also pressures her to go to bed with him, and then disappears for several weeks without telling her. The writer is now more cautious about getting involved.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- The writer thinks it's a warning sign when Joey tells her he sometimes lies, but she still goes out with him. Why do you think she still goes out with him?
- Both boyfriends pressure the



writer to have sex, although she doesn't want to. If you were the writer and didn't want to have sex, would you have broken up with the boys, or continued to see them? Why/why not?

- Were there other warning signs in both relationships that the writer should have heeded? For example, the writer says Gene didn't do or say anything to make her skeptical. Do you agree?

### Roleplay:

- Two teens, playing the writer and either Joey or Gene. Joey (or Gene) thinks he did nothing wrong in the relationship. The writer wants him to know how he hurt her, and to not hurt other girls in the same way in the future.

## Creative Dates

- In "Places to Go," (p. 23), Karolina Kwiatkowska offers alternatives to the played out "dinner and a movie" routine. She suggests getting to know each other over a game of

pool, by bowling, by taking a walk in the park, or by playing board games. After all, you can't really talk during a movie.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- List three ideas for new kinds of things you could do on a date. Discuss.
- What's the best date you ever went on? What made it special?
- Describe your worst date.
- In your relationship, which one of you decides what you'll do on your dates? Does one of you have more of a say than the other? Why?

## Hail Howard

In "Hail to the King," p. 24, Matt Kamel describes his admiration for radio shock-jock Howard Stern. Matt loves Howard's raunchy humor, which brings celebrities down to our level, although he admits most women don't find it funny. Howard keeps him laughing, and that's all that counts.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Do you like Howard Stern's humor? Why or why not?
- Do you agree with Matt that men generally like raunchy humor and women do not? If so, why do you think the two sexes have different attitudes toward humor?
- What defines humor as gross? Is any kind of humor appropriate? Or are there certain lines that shouldn't be crossed? Where do you draw the line?



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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