



Tips for Teachers

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

January/February 2003

Writing Contest— \$175 in Prizes

Writing Contest, p. 3: Encourage your students to enter this month's Writing Contest, which offers \$175 in prizes. The topic is:

**“What Place and Time
Would You Travel Back
To? Why?”**

You may want to devote part of your class to discussing this topic, before turning to the writing.

Deadline: February 10

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

www.youthcomm.org



Additional copies may be downloaded at our website, under “Teacher Resources.”

About This Month's Tips for Teachers

We have included two full-class lessons in this month's Tips for Teachers, one that focuses on social/emotional issues and writing, and one that is modeled on the Regents English Exam.

The first lesson is based on “House of Stress” (p. 2). It includes reading, discussion, and writing. The lesson is designed to help students identify stress in their lives, and strategies for relieving it, while encouraging them to do a close reading of a story. They also write a letter in response to the story. (You can send the letters to us, if you like.)

The second lesson is based on “What's a ‘Good’ College, Anyway?” (pp. 4-5), and is structured to follow the Regents format. This lesson is good practice for students who will have to take the English Regents.

House of Stress (p. 2)

—*Core Emotion(s) in story:* frustration, anger, feeling overwhelmed

—*Theme:* Taking on impossible responsibilities can lead to feeling angry and overwhelmed.

—*Plot:* The writer, 17, lives with her stepmom, an older stepsister, and three younger half siblings. The mother, the father, and the stepsister do not pitch in equally in child care, chores, etc., leaving them to the writer. She is totally overwhelmed and wants out.



Goals:—To help readers realize they are not the only ones with a lot of stress
—To help readers realize they may be trying to cope with more stress than is fair or reasonable to expect of them
—To help those readers feel less guilty about feeling overwhelmed
—To help readers identify strategies for relieving stress
—To encourage students to do a close reading of the story and prepare a written response.

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

Introduction: Many teens have heavy, adult-like responsibilities: caring for siblings, chores, being the family translator, etc. Sometimes these responsibilities are the result of poverty, recent immigration, or the need for parents to hold several jobs. Other times they may be related to parental drug abuse, mental illness, or other problems which overwhelm their capacity to care for their children.

Regardless of the cause, one result is the many teens feel overwhelmed and stressed out by their responsibilities. Most of the stress is caused by the circumstances. But teens often feel additional stress because they feel guilty about not doing as good a job as they think they should, because they feel resentful, etc. Their problems may be compounded because they don't have strategies for relieving the stress.

This exercise will help teens identify sources of stress and think about how they can relieve it.

LESSON

Tell the students you are going to read a story about a teen who is under stress, called "House of Stress," and then discuss it and write a letter to the writer. But first, you are going to do several short freewriting prompts. Tell them you will read a prompt, or sentence completion, and they have to respond. They will have only 90 seconds, and the only rule is they have to keep their pen moving, even if they have nothing to say.

Tell the students they don't have to share what they write, but they can if they want to. Tell them that the purpose of the exercise is simply to free up their thinking; grammar and punctuation do not matter. The free writes will not be collected.

(*Very important:* You should write alongside the students. This will help you be more emotionally in touch with the lesson, and will build trust with the students. If everyone is still writing after 90 seconds, give them another 30 seconds.)

Freewriting Prompt 1:

"A situation that causes a lot of stress in my life is _____."

[Tell the students to briefly describe the situation, and explain why it is so stressful. They should also mention the emotions that they feel as a result of the



Kenly Dillard

stress.]

Have a brief discussion of the responses. Tell students they can talk in general terms (e.g., "issues with my family" if they don't want to be too revealing). Go around the room and ask people to read off just the emotions they wrote down. Note and affirm similarities and differences (e.g., you may note that many people feel hyper when they are stressed, but others may say it makes them lazy).

Freewriting Prompt 2:

Tell the students—Now, I want you to think about what you do to reduce the stress you wrote about. Complete these sentences:

"I feel less stress when I _____."

Briefly discuss students strategies for

reducing stress. (This will help give students a *peer-validated* range of strategies they can try for themselves.)

Freewriting Prompt 3:

Tell the students—Now I want you to think about things you *wish* you could do, or had done, to reduce stress.

"If I could _____, I would feel less stress."

Briefly discuss.

Freewriting Prompt 4:

Tell the students—Look at the last prompt [If I could _____, I would feel less stress.] Write a few sentences about *why* you can't (or won't) do that. What's the obstacle or challenge to doing that?

Discussion: Briefly discuss strategies

to reduce stress, and obstacles. Note that it can be hard to change the circumstances that are causing stress. It may be easier to work on our reactions to it.

Read the Story

(You can read it, but we find that students usually like reading aloud, each student taking a section.)

Some questions you might want to raise during the reading: Toward bottom of first column: Stop and ask the students what they think of the stepmother. Why is she behaving the way she does? Is she just lazy? Stressed herself? Does she deserve any compassion. Why or why not?

Top of second column: Should the fact that the stepsister had a hard life excuse her from her chores?

Bottom of third column: The father works and fixes things around the house. What other responsibilities does he have?

Fourth column, end of 2nd paragraph: If the writer talks to her father, will she be adding to his burden? Even if she is, should she still consider talking to him? Why or why not? (What about the writer's burden?) What if she told her father, and he told her there was nothing he could do about it, or he was too busy to care? How do you think she would feel? Why?

End of story: Do the students think the writer's stress stems more from the circumstances in the house, or from keeping her anger inside? Why do the students think the writer does not confront her father or her stepsister? Try to get a range of responses. Do not judge them, but let students comment on each other's responses.

Activities

Main Activity: "Letter to the Writer"—Have students write a letter to the writer, suggesting ways she can reduce the stress in her situation. You may want to write these three prompts on the board to give students a suggested framework for their letter.

—Tell the writer what she can do *about the situation* (e.g., doing less work, confronting her father.)

—Tell the writer what stress *reduction techniques* have worked for you, and why they might work for her.

—Tell the writer what you think of *her*

plan to leave at 18 (before she has graduated from high school). How might she benefit? What might be the problems?

B. Optional Small Group Activity—

Using the board, or a flip chart, put these three headings on the wall:

1. Things the writer can do (to make her situation less stressful)
2. Techniques the writer can use (to reduce the stress she feels)
3. Her options when she turns 18

Have students brainstorm every idea they can come up with. (This discussion helps the class members to see new strategies for dealing with stress, and send the message that it's normal to feel stress, and to try to do something about it.)

C. Optional Large Group Activity—

"Advice Competition"

Break the students into groups of two to five people. Each group has to discuss the three statements (for the Letter, above), make written notes to themselves, and make a presentation to the whole class about what the writer can do to improve her situation.

Take a couple students aside and make them judges, along with you. (This can be a good way to get a couple of disruptive students out of the groups, and give them an important responsibility.) Explain to them that they must be impartial, and must take notes on the presentations. After the presentations, huddle with them and determine a winner.

Very important: Don't simply announce a winner. Summarize the best arguments of each group (to re-state the good points, and to validate their ideas). Then, explain what *special* quality or ideas result in one group being the winner.

Closing question: Ask the teens how *they* cause stress for others (e.g., parents, siblings, teachers.) Is there anything they can do to reduce the stress they cause others?

Practice Lesson for Regents Exam Listening Section

Story: "What's a 'Good' College, Anyway?" on pp. 4-5 of issue.

What the teacher needs to know to use this lesson

The Regents English exam has a listening section. A proctor reads the students an **Overview** (see below) and **The Situation** (see below). The proctor then reads a passage to the students, *twice*, during which the students can take notes. The students then answer some multiple choice questions and write a report based on the **Situation**.

Step One Read the Overview and the Situations

(Note: During the real test, the students have a printed version of the Overview and the Situation in front of them as the proctor reads the story. If you can't make copies, consider writing the overview on the board, or just read it to them.)

Read this to your students:

Overview: You will listen to an article about choosing a college, answer some multiple choice questions and write a response based on the situation which I will read to you next. You will hear the article twice. You may take notes.

Situation: You are helping a group of sophomores to learn about the college admission process. You have to write a report which gives them advice about selecting a college. To prepare your report listen to the article about what college officials look for when they judge applications. Then use relevant information from the article to write your report.

Step Two: Multiple Choice Questions

After reading the article for the second time, give them the questions on the next page. (Photocopy them at your school.)

What's a 'Good' College, Anyway?

Multiple Choice Questions

1) According to the writer the first thing most colleges look at in an application is:

- a) your school's name.
- b) extracurricular activities.
- c) grades and SAT scores.
- d) quality of courses.

2) The writer says a good college experience is one which

- a) prepares you for a good job.
- b) lets you meet people who can help you later in life.
- c) gives you prestige.
- d) provides growth opportunities and lets you enjoy yourself.

3) According to one counselor, what do most private schools require as part of the application that most state universities don't?

- a) essay
- b) SAT scores
- c) letters of recommendation
- d) application fee

4) The statement "We live in a very prestige oriented society" means

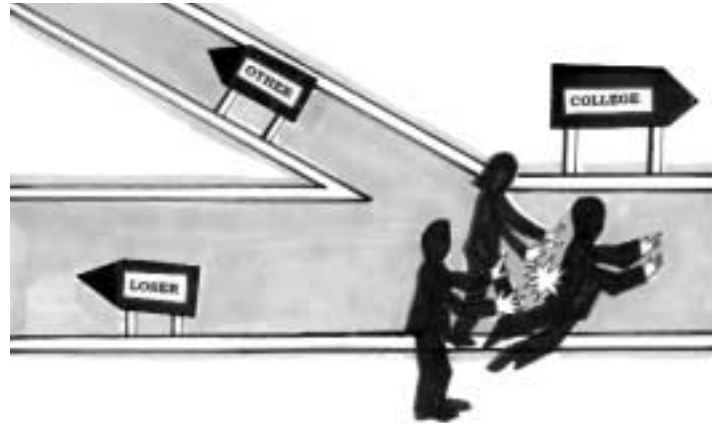
- a) we are judged by our abilities.
- b) money is very important to Americans.
- c) reputations matter a lot.
- d) hard work is the key to success.

5) The most important point the writer is trying to make is:

- a) you should go to a private school if you can
- b) picking a college is stressful
- c) you should do a lot of research and know what you want in a school
- d) going to college helps you get a good job

6) According to one counselor, what determines how a potential employer judges a person's college record?

- a) extracurricular activities
- b) grades
- c) types of courses taken
- d) whether a school is public or private



Cezary Ladocha

Writing the Report

Your task: Write a report for a class of sophomores in which you inform them about choosing a college and what college admissions staff look at when they consider applications. Use specific and relevant information from the article you heard.

Here are the guidelines based on the actual Regents exam:

- Tell your audience what they need to know about choosing a college and what admissions staff look for.
- Use specific, accurate, and relevant information from the article to support your discussion.
- Use a tone and level of language appropriate for the high school sophomores who will read your paper.
- Organize your ideas in a logical and coherent manner.
- Indicate any words taken directly from the article by using quotation marks or referring to the writer.
- Follow the conventions of standard written English.