



# Tips for Teachers

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

January/February 2004

## Teens Search for Identity

In this issue, eight teens write about the struggle to build their own identity, separate from stereotypical expectations and pressures of friends, family, and race. The writers are African-American, Asian-, Hispanic-, Haitian-, and Indian-American, and mixed African-American and Jewish. There will be students in almost any class who can relate to some of the issues in these stories.

Here is a brief summary of the stories. Following the summaries is a longer discussion of some of the themes that you can tap to prompt rich discussion and/or writing in your classes.

—*I'm Not What You Expect Me to Be* (p. 3). Jordan Yue writes about the pressures he feels from parents and the larger culture to be a well-behaved, sexless math whiz. It's only when he becomes friends with a group of Black and Hispanic kids that he becomes comfortable with balancing doing well in school and chilling and partying on the side. (See also Jordan's story on Asian stereotypes in film, p. 23.)

—*A Short Cut to Independence* (p. 5). When Anita Chikkatur, a "good Indian girl," decides to chop off her long hair, her family feels like she's betrayed their culture and Indian ideals of womanhood. Anita feels free.

—*All Mixed Up* (p. 8). Satra Wasserman has a Black mother and a White father. From 1st through 8th grades he was teased and

harassed at school. Only in high school does he begin to feel comfortable with who he is.

—*Asian by Association* (p. 10).

Jessica Vicuna is Puerto Rican, but growing up on the Lower East Side she is also surrounded by Asian peers and culture, which she comes to love.

—*Princess Oreo Speaks Out* (p. 11).

Telly Carter is Black, but she can't dance, or use slang, and she listens rock music. Even her family accuses her of being White. But she's happy being who she is.

—*Isn't She Lovely* (p. 16). Cynthia

Recio doesn't dress "ghetto" like some of her Latina peers, and she also doesn't look White, like many Latinas on TV. But she doesn't worry about not fitting other people's standards for what she should look like.

—*Sticking With Your Own Kind* (p. 16).

Cassandra Thadal, who's Haitian, notes that teens who collaborate in the classroom often divide up into their separate groups in the cafeteria. She thinks it's OK and natural to "sit with your own." But one day she innocently sits with some Dominican girls. Her friends' criticism spurs her to want to "break down the walls of language, culture and bad past experiences" to stop racism.

—*Dashboard Confessional Helps Me Be Me* (p. 24). Amy Lu writes, "On the outside, I blend in. I look like a clean-cut, smart, perky, Asian girl, but...the inner self that only my close friends see is a sarcastic, cursing slacker." Listening to the band Dashboard Confessional helps bring out her true personality.

## THEMES

### Independence from Parental Expectations

One of the major developmental tasks for teens is to develop a stable identity. That task can be especially difficult nowadays in New York City. For example, many teens are being raised by parents who were born in other cultures. If the teens stay too loyal to their parents, they may be teased by their friends. If they



become too Americanized, their parents may feel betrayed. That dilemma is felt most strongly by Jordan Yue (p. 3) and Anita Chikkatur (p. 5). Their parents have firm expectations about what their children need to do to succeed in their eyes, but Jordan and Anita feel confined by those expectations. Jordan acts up in school, and becomes loud, rude, and obnoxious. Anita, by chopping off her long hair, also sends a very public and (for her parents) embarrassing message of independence.

If you work with students whose parents (esp. immigrants) have firm expectations about how children from "their group" should look and behave, these stories will raise provocative issues. Questions you can explore include:

—What rights should parents have to tell their children how to look or behave? How far should teens go in seeking independence? Is it OK to cut your hair, or hang out with other groups? Is it OK to date people from other groups? (If you have time, have students read *Asian by Association*, p. 10, and ask if anyone

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Tips for Teachers is also available on our web site at:  
[www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org)

## AWARDS FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Youth Communication is sponsoring its 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Awards for Youth in Foster Care. If you know a young person in the city's foster care sys-

tem and would like to nominate him or her for an award please visit our web site for information on eligibility and an application. That's at [youthcomm.org](http://youthcomm.org).

would go that far in embracing another culture? Is that OK? Or is that writer rejecting her own culture?)

Would it be harder for a boy to embrace another culture in that way than it is for a girl? Why or why not?

**Activity: Role Play**—Characters: Three students, two playing Anita's parents, and one playing Anita.

Scene: Anita's parents are sitting at home in their living room just before dinner. The smell of Indian food is coming from the kitchen. There are statues of several Hindu gods on the coffee table. An Indian music CD is playing. (Describe this scene so students get an idea that Indian culture is very important in the family.)

Anita walks in, having just chopped off her hair. Her parents look up, and can't quite believe what they see.

Dialogue: The students should create a dialogue of the discussion between Anita and her parents at this point.

Before beginning, explain to the "parents" that their goal in the conversation is to show their displeasure, and to explain to Anita why it is so important not to go against them and her culture.

"Anita's" goal is to convince her parents that she's her own person; she's not going "against" them, she's going "for" herself.

**Note:** The recent movie *Bend It Like Beckham* explored race and gender roles



Fernando Garcia

among Indian and White girls in England. It might stir some good discussion among your students.

## Public Self/Private Self

Amy Lu (p. 24) makes a clear distinction between her "public self" which is a perky, pink-wearing, clean-cut Asian girl, and her "private self" which is a cursing slacker. She says she wants to let more of her true self out, to be "more honest" about what's going on in her mind. For now, however, the only way she does that is behind closed doors, listening to emotional music.

**Activity:** Ask your students to draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper. On one side, write, "Public self: what I show others" and on the other side write, "Private self: who I am inside." Then ask them to fill in the two columns for Amy Lu, based on what she writes in the article.

**Discuss:** What did the students put in each column? Why? Why do they think Amy is so reluctant to show more of her private self in public? What would she lose? What would she gain?

Then ask students to do the same exercise for themselves, listing important things about their public self in the left column and their private self in the right. Have a short discussion about what students have written.

### Longer Writing Assignment

Ask the students to write an essay which follows the structure of Amy's essay.

**Beginning:** Describe an experience, such as listening to music, identifying with a character in a comic or movie, or meeting a new friend, for example, that helped them to see a new side of themselves, or that brings out a private side.

**Middle:** Describe the public self they show to the world and the private self they keep inside, giving examples. Show the conflict. Describe how they feel about the split between their public and private self.

**End:** Describe how strongly they want to let out more of the private self, and what they

think might happen (good and bad) if they did.

### Short Writing Assignment

Amy writes that listening to Dashboard Confessional helps her to be herself. Ask your students to write a short essay describing what kind of music—or a band or rapper or a single song—that particularly helps them to be themselves.

Tell them to be as specific as possible. If it's the lyrics they relate to, they need to quote them. If it's the sound of the band (such as an angry or peaceful sound) they need to describe what makes it feel that way to them. If it's the singer's persona (such as 50 Cent's street toughness), they need to give examples of it. It might help if you tell them something like, "Pretend you're going to show this essay to a Martian, who knows nothing about you or our culture. You have to describe it so well that the Martian will know what you're talking about.)



Carolina Moya

## Acting White

Dwan Carter (p. 11), Cynthia Recio (p. 16)

## NEW! QUICK INSIGHT BOOKLETS

We recently published 21 "mini-booklets." These are collections of 5-8 stories from *New Youth Connections* magazine. Each booklet focuses on one topic so teen readers can get a variety of perspectives on one issue. Topics range from peer pressure to body image. See page 14 of the January/February 2004 issue for a list of titles and ordering information. You can also visit [youthcomm.org](http://youthcomm.org) to see our complete publication catalog.

and Janill Briones (p. 4) are all accused of “acting White” because of the way they dress, or talk, or the music they listen to. Each of these writers rejects the idea that they cannot talk or dress as they like or listen to certain music because it is typically associated with White people.

What do your students think? Is Princess Oreo really an Oreo (that is, is she denying her Blackness and trying to be White, or is she just trying to be herself?). Does the fact Cynthia and Janill don’t want to wear chest hugging tops, or speak standard English, make them less Latina?

What about Satra Wasserman? Is he White? Black? Or something else? He says that he identifies with no particular group—that his friendships are based on interests, not race. Is that possible?

### Role Models Activity

Jordan Yue (p. 4) mentions that his heroes were characters like Han Solo in Star Wars and Wolverine in X-Men. He saw important aspects of his personality in them. Have your students identify a character from TV, film, comics, or a band or song, that they feel expresses their personality. In a short essay, explain how they relate to the character.

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## TIPS FOR TEACHING THE FIVE PARAGRAPH ESSAY (and have some fun doing it)

This lesson will give your students practice in writing the classic five-part argumentative essay.

The “Street Connections” on page 2 in this issue asks the question “If pets could talk, would they make better or worse companions?” Students responded very enthusiastically to this prompt.

Have your students consider the following statements:

- Overall, I think it would be great if pets could talk.
- Overall, I think it would be a bad thing if pets could talk.

(There are two ways to go from here. You can have them read the nine responses to this question and then write an essay, using some of the arguments from the responses. Or you can have them develop their own reasons first, write the essay, then read the responses, and then incorporate some of the reasons from the responses in a second draft of their essays.)

In either case you should review or introduce the structure of the five-part essay.

**Paragraph I:** Opening statement of opinion. This should be more than just a rehash of “It would be great if pets could talk...” Urge them to think of a sentence which grabs the reader’s attention: “If my dog Flo could talk it would drive me out of my mind.” or “My dog Flo would make great contributions to society if she could talk.”

**Paragraphs II, III and IV:** Each paragraph focuses on one reason which supports the statement. Each reason must have some evidence to back it up.

**Paragraph V:** This paragraph restates the opinion and summarizes the reasons.

**NOTE:** If you want a more serious topic to base an essay on, have your students read “What Should Teens Be Taught About Sex?” on page 7. Have your students brainstorm the pros and cons of the abstinence approach to sex education versus an approach including information about contraception, etc. Then they can write a five-part essay.

## Practice Lesson for Regents Exam Listening Section

**Use story:** “Sex Ed in the City” on p. 6

**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 time 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 of the overview, 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 written by a teenager about sex education classes in New York City’s public schools. You will then answer some multiple choice questions and write a report on the situation described below. You will hear the article twice. You may take notes.

**The Situation:** Your class has been asked to recommend changes in how sex education is taught in the schools. Listen to this story and then use information from the story to write your position paper.

Step Two: Tell your students, “Now I will read the passage aloud to you for the first time.”

After reading the story once, say:

“You make take a few minutes to look over The Situation and your notes.” (Pause) “Now I will read the story again.”

Step Three: Multiple Choice Questions and Report

After reading the article for the second time give them the questions on the next page. The next page also contains guidelines for writing the report. (Photocopy them at your school.)

Here are the answers to the multiple choice questions:

- 1) b 2) c 3) a 4) d 5) c 6) c

# Sex Ed in the City

## Multiple Choice Questions

**Directions:** Use your notes to answer the questions about the story read to you.

**1) What kind of formal sex education did the two teenagers quoted in the passage experience?**

- a) They had “abstinence only” classes.
- b) They had no classes.
- c) They were taught about abstinence and contraception.
- d) One had abstinence only education and the other had no sex education at all.

**2) What statement would the author of this article most likely agree with?**

- a) Most students get not great but still adequate sex education in the schools.
- b) It is more important for students to learn about abstinence than to learn about contraception.
- c) Changes must be made in the way the city teaches students about sex.
- d) Students can't do anything about improving sex education in their schools.

**3) What needed improvement in sex education does the author not mention?**

- a) Spend more money.
- b) Let students teach some sex education classes.
- c) Train teachers better.
- d) Update the curriculum.

**4) How can students get condoms at their schools?**

- a) They get them from their sex education teachers.
- b) They can get them from peer education programs in schools
- c) They cannot get them in schools.
- d) They must ask teachers assigned to give out condoms.

**5) What does the term “family planning” refer to?**

- a) Learning how to be a good parent.
- b) Making sure every child receives adequate sex education
- c) Determining when you and your partner have a child.
- d) Picking a good school for your children.

**6) What sexually transmitted infection is mentioned most in the article?**

- a) Genital warts
- b) Herpes
- c) HIV
- d) None of the above

NOTE: Below are the written instructions which accompany the test about writing the report. You may want to hand these out or write them on the board.

## Writing the Report

**Your task:** Write a paper suggesting ways to improve sex education in schools. Use specific and relevant information from the article you heard.

Here are the guidelines given on the actual Regents exam:

- Tell your audience what they need to know about sex education in the schools and how it can be improved.
- 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.