



Tips for Teachers

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

January/February 2005

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Letters to the Editor A Great “Do Now” Writing Exercise

We publish as many letters as we can. Please encourage your students to write to our young writers. They love getting mail.

The following stories might get your students going on writing letters.

“Playing Video Games Won’t Make Me a Killer” by Kenneth Douglas, p. 6. What effect does playing violent video games have on teenagers? Not much, Kenneth argues, and neither do violent movies, comic books, rap music and other media delights. Is his argument convincing?

“Dear Usher” by Stephanie Hinkson, p. 9. Stephanie says goodbye (or does she?) to her longtime relationship with this pop idol. Do your students think as highly of Usher as she does?

“Why Are Teens So Tired?” by Janill Briones, p. 8. How much sleep do your students get? How much do they think they need? Do they sleepwalk through the day and feel raring to go at 11 pm?

“Putting the Essay into the New SAT”

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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by Megan Cohen, p. 7. Will the new SAT and its writing section be unfair to students? Can an essay written in 25 minutes under stressful conditions measure a student’s ability?

Three College Stories:

If you are working with juniors please point out these stories to them.

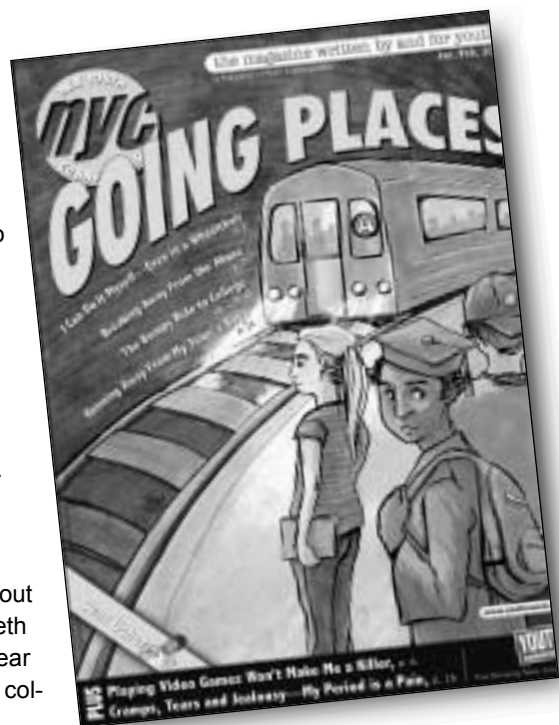
Choosing and Applying

“My College Cloud,” by Kenneth Douglas, p. 12, is a cautionary tale about the college application process. Kenneth relates how at the start of his senior year he was still clueless about applying to college. His family was no help and he describes his school counseling system as confused and ineffective. He finally overcomes his passivity and takes it upon himself to research colleges, make sensible choices, and complete the application process. Here are questions you can ask with Kenneth’s story.

—Was Kenneth doing the best thing by picking a college solely based on a very specific career choice?

—He applies to only 3 colleges and he really only wants to attend one. Should he have applied to some “just in case” schools?

—Why was he so passive for so long? Some teens visit schools, talk to current students and alumni, sign up for out-of-school counseling programs, etc. Was Kenneth shortchanging himself by not making these efforts?



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The New Writing Section on the SAT

“Putting Essay into the New SAT,” by Megan Cohen, p. 7. The March 2005 SAT will give students 25 minutes to write an essay to prove they can start doing college level work. Megan takes a preview of the test and doesn’t understand how anyone can think this is a good idea. If your students are planning to take the SAT, this story will help alert them to the importance of the new writing section.

Application Costs

“Can I Even Afford to Apply?” by Stephanie Perez, p. 13. Your juniors won’t get sticker shock this fall if they read Stephanie’s article on the cost of applying to colleges and taking College Board exams.

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



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A Lesson in Including Disabled Students

“I Can Do It Myself,” by Tania Morales, p. 3.

Goal: To help your students better understand how a peer in a wheelchair sees the world, and how similar it is to their own experience.

Story Summary: Tania uses a wheelchair because she has a disease that prevents her from walking. But she does not feel sorry for herself. Instead, most of her energy is spent trying to get more freedom and independence (just like most teens). She can’t stand the fact that her mom is overprotective and wants to accompany her to events. She wants to fire the para-professional (para) who pushes her around school (and makes it so she never has private time with her friends). She wants to learn the city bus system so she can travel on her own.

Pre-Discussion: Before reading the story, have a general discussion with your students about independence and disability. You can ask them:

—Do they know anyone who uses a wheelchair? If so, how do they interact with that person? Is there anyone in the school who uses a wheelchair? Have they ever talked to that person? Pushed them? Talked *about* them?

—Explain that some teens in wheelchairs have paras to monitor them and push them around. Ask if they think the person in the chair likes that. Why or why

not?

—Ask if they’ve ever seen someone in a chair get on a bus they were riding. What did they think? How did other passengers react?

—Ask if they know how to use the city bus system. Have they ever traveled on buses outside their borough? Why or why not? (Many teens are afraid to use buses or trains on routes they don’t already know.)

—Ask how they’d feel if everywhere they went they had to have an adult chaperone with them (a para, or a parent, for example).

Read the story: Tell the students to circle two kinds of items in the story. First, circle every place where Tania talks about or demonstrates her independence. Second, also have them circle anything that surprises them about Tania.

Post-Discussion: After reading the story, ask students to read aloud the instances where Tania is independent. (There are a lot of them.) Ask why they think she’s so determined to be independent. (Many of

Writing Contest: send a Letter to Parents

p. 2 Deadline: February 7, 2005

Introduction

Each year we invite NYC readers to write letters to their parents about something they have been reluctant to tell them. This contest generates more enthusiasm (and essays) than any other. Your students will enjoy writing these essays—and you’ll learn a lot about them.

They can write about anything, and over the years they have written about everything: cutting school, falling in love, taking drugs, etc. They have written about feelings of love and hatred toward their parents, events in their lives, hopes for the future.

Please tell your students that the letters need not be about dramatic or sensational situations like contracting AIDS or contemplating suicide. Any situation or feeling can produce a letter that’s likely to be published: breaking a plate, anger about not getting a gift, cut-

ting a class, unspoken love for the parent or a sibling. On a humorous note, one year we published a letter from a son confessing that he was a Martian.

Remind your students that because many of the letters reveal very private information, all of this month’s winning essays will be published anonymously, and we’ll change a few details if necessary to completely conceal the writer’s identity. The winners’ names will be chosen at random from among all the entrants.

Lesson

The popularity of this contest suggests that teens have a lot on their mind that they’d like to share with their parents. You can use the contest to start class interchanges about families and trust.

Help your students get started on this contest by sharing some of the

opening lines from previous letters:

- I’m writing you this letter to confront you about how I am feeling.
- This is something that you never knew.
- There is something I would like to tell you.
- Ma, I am writing this letter to let you know all the things I did that you didn’t know about.
- First of all, I want to say “I love you.”
- I have been more or less honest with you all my life.
- I guess I’d like to think that I tell you everything.

PS: If you send a class set please make sure each entry has a name and address on it. (The name and address can be on a separate piece of paper, which we’ll put into a hat from which we draw the winners.)

their answers will have to do with the fact that Tania is a teenager, so of course she wants to be independent. Highlight those answers, and draw the connection between your students' desires for independence and hers.)

Ask if the students will do anything differently the next time they see someone in a chair. (For example, might they be more likely to talk to that person, or horse around with her? Would they be more understanding and less likely to complain if someone gets on a bus with a chair and causes a slight delay?)

Travel Stories: A Writing Exercise

"Subway Tunnel of Love," by Danielle Morganstern, p. 24.

Goal: To have students write a story about a time they got to know someone better by traveling with them.

There is something about being in a moving vehicle that can lead to a special kind of intimacy. A long car or bus trip can be a great way to get to know someone in a way that you just wouldn't or couldn't if you were sitting across from each other in a restaurant, for example. For Danielle Morganstern, it's riding the subway that brings her closer to her boyfriend.

Story summary: On their second date, Danielle and her boyfriend have what could be the subway ride from hell. Delays and confusion turn a 45-minute ride into 7 hours, and she gets home at 7 a.m. But instead of going crazy, she and her boyfriend talk, cuddle and grow closer and more comfortable with each other.

Discussion and free write: Ask your students to think of a time when they traveled with someone and got to know them better, or talked about something important while traveling. To get them thinking, point out that there are many possible kinds of travel: subway, city bus, a field trip bus, or bus to camp, a plane trip, a car trip. (If they can't think of anything, tell them they can count a long walk too. And if they still can't think of anything, tell them they can write about any time they got to know someone better—just to be sure everyone has something to write about.) The person could be a parent, grandparent, friend, boy- or girlfriend...even a stranger.

Ask each student to write a few facts about the experience. First, a scene: Describe the location of the discussion. Car, bus, etc.? Fancy? Ratty? Noisy? Quiet? Other people there or all alone, etc? Give the reader a picture of the place. Second, describe the person and why they are or became important to the writer. Third, describe or list several feelings they had during the discussion. (These notes will be the raw material of the essay they will write.)

Read the story: Ask students to circle scenes that stand out for them. (For example, the scene where Danielle checks her cell phone is funny, and it creates tension because we don't know how her mom is going to react. There's a scene in the Fulton St. subway station

tion), where they're going, and a tiny bit about why this moment in their life was important.

Body of story: Students should include at least three scenes from their experience or discussion. Remind them that if the first scene sets up a little tension, they will be more likely to grab the reader's interest. For example, "My mom and I were driving to my grandmother's. It was going to take 3 hours, about as long as our average fight...." Or, "The bus was already almost full, so I had to sit next to a girl that I barely knew while all my friends were in the back. I couldn't believe my bad luck..." Or, "We hadn't seen each other in three years, and I wondered if we'd have anything to say to each other."



where it's getting colder and later, and they're getting closer. There's the scene on the warm bus as they get near her home in Queens.)

After reading, ask students to read aloud the scenes they've circled. Help them to see how these scenes help us picture the growing closeness of Danielle and her boyfriend.

Writing assignment: Tell your students to look at their notes. They contain the foundation of their essay. Tell them that they can use Danielle's essay as a model. The outline would look something like this:

Introduction: Introduce the characters, the means of transportation (or other loca-

The next two scenes (or more) can heighten the tension, and show how it gets resolved. "The first thing my mom said was, 'Take out that nose ring before we get to Grandmother's. She's very critical.'"

"Just like you," I blurted out.

And then more scenes, which carry us further into the story and why it is important. "I thought she was going to yell at me, but that shut her up for a few minutes. I could tell she was thinking..."

Conclusion/Ending: What changed for the writer (and the relationship) as a result of the experience? How is she different? Why?

Self Esteem & Domestic Violence Lesson

“Breaking Away from Abuse,” by K.I.P., p. 10.

Goal: To help students see that abuse is not normal or appropriate, and that there are ways to escape an abuser.

Story summary: The writer’s mother is abused by her father. The mother eventually summons the courage to leave him, which helps to inspire the writer to achieve her goals and become independent.

Pre-Discussion: Ask your students if they’ve heard the term “domestic violence” and what they think it means. [A few should know that it generally refers to men abusing women in relationships. It can also refer to women abusing men (which is much less common), and to parents abusing children, but that’s usually called child abuse.] For the sake of this discussion, define domestic violence as one spouse abusing the other, usually with physical violence, and often with mental abuse as well (belittling, coercing, controlling).

Ask students why they think someone would allow themselves to be abused. (They’ll mention things like loving the person, needing income, staying together for the children, etc.). Restate the question: what does a person who is being abused gain from staying in the relationship? Then ask, “What do they lose?” (Students will say things like self-respect, respect of children, sense of safety, etc.) [The idea behind this discussion is that people who are abused often stay in the relationship for good reasons, like needing financial support. But by weighing the benefits vs. the costs, it can be easier to develop the courage to leave, because it can help the person who’s being abused see that in addition to escaping *from* something, they can also be escaping *to* something, like greater respect from their children, which means more to them than the love or support of the abuser.]

Ask students how someone in an abusive relationship can get out of it.

(They’ll mention things like getting counseling to help end the abuse, walking out, calling the police, getting a restraining order, etc.)

Read the story: Tell the students that they’re going to read a story about domestic violence. While they are reading, ask the students to do two things.

- 1) Circle every example of abuse.
- 2) Underline every example of steps the mother takes to try to become more independent and escape from the abuse.

Post-Discussion: Have students volunteer to read the examples of abuse. (They may disagree about what is abuse. Let them argue without passing judgment. For



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example, some may feel that it was abusive to not pay for the wife’s college classes. Some might argue that having a mistress is not abusive. Ask if anyone in the class has another opinion and you’re likely to get one, so you don’t have jump in.)

Then have them read the examples of what the mother does to escape. Ask them what they think was the most important thing the mother did.

Note: They might say it was telling her daughter she wanted her to grow up strong and independent, because that showed she understood that her own situation had to change. Or they might say it was getting the secret job, because that made her more independent. Or they might say it was the day she kicked him out. All of these answers are “right.” Whichever ones students give, ask them why they chose that particular incident. The goal of this discussion is to have stu-

dents see and explore lots of things that people who are being abused can do to change their situation.

Ask the students if they think K.I.P.’s mother loves her father. (We don’t know, but let’s assume she does.) Ask the students whether love is a good enough reason to stay in the relationship.

Ask the students if there is anything that the mother or daughter did that surprised them. Someone will probably mention that the mother forgave the father. Ask why she did that. (Partly for religious reasons, but also because it was harmful to her to hold onto the hate.) Do they think she was right to forgive him? Why or why not?

What did the mother do after she forgave the father (i.e., did she allow him to move back in?). No! As K.I.P. says, “She will never go back to him. She wants to be free to live her life.”

Ask students whether they think she should let him come back. (Note: Many people who have been abused go back to the abuser after he apologizes and says he’ll never do it again. K.I.P.’s mother is more clear-eyed: She knows he probably can’t stop himself. She forgives him, but is unwilling to jeopardize her future by letting him come back.)

Ask students if they think the writer’s determination to succeed is related to her mother’s actions?

Why? How? What if the mother had not kicked out her father...do they think she’d still have the same determination or be as successful? Why or why not?

Final question: How would students describe the mother? They’ll probably say things like brave, determined, etc., though some may be still be angry at her for kicking the father out or rather, not kicking him out sooner.

(Note: In almost any classroom there is likely to be at least one family experiencing domestic violence, and even some teen relationships include domestic violence. One of the contributing factors is that the girl may not realize that she has a right not to be abused, and that other people admire people who take action to end abuse. This discussion should validate that option.)