



# Tips for Teachers

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

March 2002

## Writing Contest— \$175 in Prizes

“Who’s Your Most Memorable Teacher? Why Does He or She Stand Out? Explain in Detail.”

Writing Contest, p. 2: Encourage your students to enter this month’s Writing Contest, which offers \$175 in prizes. You may want to devote part of your class to discussing this topic, before turning to the writing.

## A note on the lessons

The following lessons are designed to promote reflection on 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, role plays and group exercises are sometimes suggested for more active learning experiences.

## A note on the roleplays

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

## A note on the group exercises

A note on the group exercises: These activities are designed to have students work together in pairs or small groups. They can then share their work with the larger group in a general discussion.

## THIS ISSUE’S THEME: TAKING A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE MEDIA

In this issue of *NYC*, several writers are critical of various aspects of the media, whether it’s the mixed messages sent out by teen magazines, the emphasis on sensational rather than substantial news, or the cookie-cutter mindlessness of music videos. Encourage your group to read these stories and to think critically about how the media impact their lives.

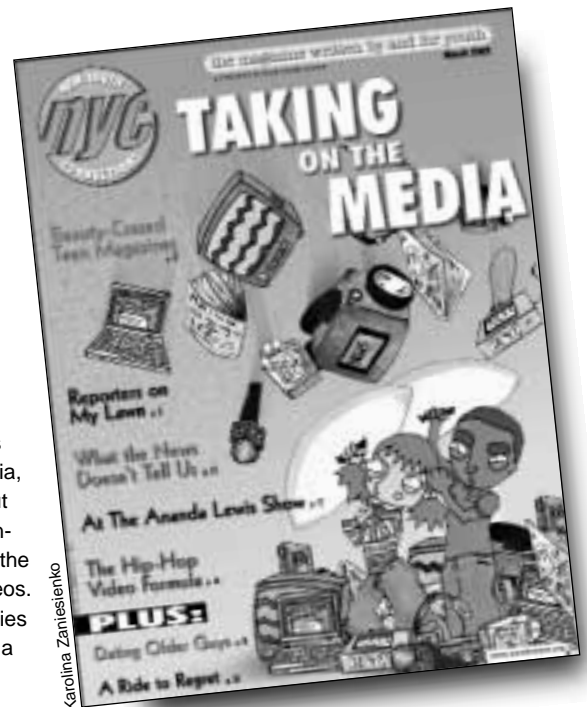
## Shallow Teen Magazines

In “Not a Pretty Picture,” p. 3, Rasheeda Raji describes her discontent with teen magazines for girls, which present distorted images of “perfect” female bodies and pay more attention to beauty tips than important issues confronting teens. Unlike many girls who read these magazines, Rasheeda is content with comfortable clothes and an average body.

## Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Rasheeda describes most magazines for teenage girls as being shallow—obsessed with celebrities, beauty tips, and unrealistic images of the female body. What is your reaction to her opinion? Do you agree or disagree with her? Why or why not?

—Rasheeda says the distorted images in these magazines cause young girls to become insecure about themselves and even, in some cases, to become anorexic or bulimic. Why do you think a magazine would have that kind of impact? Are there other influences, in addition



Karolina Zanjesienko

to magazines, that would have this impact? What are they?

—Why do you think these magazines are so popular with teens?

—Rasheeda writes: “I’m not a slave to what the media presents as beautiful or fashionable when it comes to shaping my appearance.” Can you say the same thing? Why or why not?

## Group activity:

Students can work in pairs or small groups. Rasheeda writes that writers, editors, and publishers should create more balanced publications that encourage teens to have a healthy spirit and develop self-worth based on more than looks. Tell the groups they are in charge of creating a new magazine that will appeal to both boys and girls, and that will accomplish the goals Rasheeda describes. What kinds of articles and photographs with the new magazine have? What will not be included? Have the groups share and compare their ideas in a general discussion with the class.

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

## Too Close for Comfort

In “Disaster at My Door” and “Reporters on My Lawn,” pps. 4-5, Sharon Feder describes the horror her family experienced when Flight 587 crashed one block away from her home in Queens last November. The disaster leaves her in a state of shock, and disillusioned about the reporters who descended on the scene.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—After the crash near her house, Sharon finds herself worrying less about the “little things” and more about the way she should be living her life. Did an event have a similar impact on your life? What was the event, and how and why did it change your outlook?

—When reporters visit her neighborhood to report on the crash, Sharon finds them cold and distant, and this makes her question whether she really wants to be a news journalist. Did something happen in your life to make you question a future career? What gave you doubts? Do you still have those doubts? Why or why not?

—How do you feel about the way TV and newspapers cover the news? Do you generally think they do a good job? Why or why not?



## Hostage Tot Slays O.J., Cher, and Self

In “Bad News,” p. 10, Lucas Hartstone-Rose blasts the profit-driven American media for paying more attention to sensationalized or trivial stories than to important world events, such as the AIDS epidemic and civil wars raging in Africa. After Sept. 11, he argues, it is

especially important for Americans to know more about what’s happening internationally. In a second article on p. 11 (“Journalists’ Views on the News”), Lucas interviews two journalists and a media watchdog group for their take on the state of American journalism.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Lucas writes that most American news sources tend to ignore important international stories. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

—Some accuse the American media of going after what sells rather than what’s important in reporting the news. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

—What part of the world outside the U.S. interests you the most? Why? How do you get your news about that part of the world?

—Lucas uses Africa as an example of an area that is ignored by the U.S. press. What areas of the world do you think should receive more attention in the U.S.? Why?

—Lucas notes that the American media do not report more about international events because most Americans do not seem interested in other countries. Why do you think Americans may not be interested in international events? What might change that attitude?

—After Sept. 11, do you think Americans need to know more about what is happening in the world? Why or why not?

### Group activity:

Students can work in pairs or small groups. Write the following statement from Lucas’s article on the board: “We need to know about the world so that we can hold our government responsible for its actions and inactions that contribute to the conditions that make terrorism possible.” Ask the groups to discuss what the statement means, and whether they agree or disagree with the statement. Then have the groups share and compare their ideas in a general discussion with the class.

## People Over Profit

In a related article on p. 28, (“Protesting Global Greed”), Lucas writes about his participation in demonstrations at the World Economic Forum in New York in February, to protest how the “free trade” movement exploits the environment and workers’ rights.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Have you ever demonstrated for or against something? What was the demonstration about, and what caused you to participate?

—After reading Lucas’s article, what did you learn about world economic conditions that you didn’t know before? Do you think these conditions get enough attention in newspapers

and on TV?

—Do you agree with Lucas’s point of view in this article? Why or why not?

### Roleplay:

Two students, playing Lucas and another teen. The teen argues that “global greed” is good because it raises living standards around the world: the Vietnamese women who assemble Nike sneakers may make only pennies per day, but that’s more than a lot of Vietnamese make. Lucas argues that you can have economic growth and pay higher wages at the same time.



## Where’s My Cell Phone?

Abanty Farzana, in “All Day at Ananda’s,” p. 12, participates in the taping of a popular talk show. As a member of the spontaneous and unrehearsed studio audience, she spends several hours standing, clapping, and cheering on command. And she doesn’t even get the gift she’s promised for her efforts.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—What is your reaction to Abanty’s day in the studio audience? Would you have stayed or walked out? Why?

—Do you like talk shows? Why or why not?

—Why are talk shows so popular?

### Roleplay:

Two teens. Teen #1 likes talk shows and thinks they help people with important problems. Teen #2 thinks they’re stupid and should be taken off the air.

## A Quick Way to Get Everyone Writing—Letters to the Editor:

We welcome letters to the editor and publish most of them (see p. 23). This is an easy way to involve everyone in a short writing assignment (and they will get the satisfaction of seeing their names in print). Writing letters can be an ideal “Do Now” exercise after your students finish reading articles in *NYC*. Use these prompts to get your students started (a few sentences on one or more of these points will be sufficient for a letter):

- “I liked/disliked the article because...”
- “A point I really agree with in the article, based on my experience, is...”
- “A point I really disagree with, based on my experience, is...”
- “A solution to one of the problems in this article might be...”

### Group activity:

Students can work in pairs or small groups. Abanty writes that talk shows, instead of following the same formula, should instead reach out to teen audiences by dealing with issues that concern young people. Ask the groups to come up with ideas for a new talk show that would appeal to teens, but that would be very different from talk shows currently on the air. Then have the groups share and compare their ideas in a general discussion with the class.

## Cookie-Cutter Rap Videos

In “Bentleys, Booties, and Big Pimpin’...I’ve Had Enough,” p. 14, Allajah Young writes about her disgust with formulaic

music videos that feature scantily-clad women, luxury rides, and rappers wearing enough gold to jump-start Enron.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Allajah comes down hard on rap videos that repeat the same clichés and tired formulas. Do you agree with her that rap videos are all the same? Why or why not?

—Allajah notes that rappers have original music and don’t all sound the same. But then they go out and make “cookie cutter” videos. Why do you think that is?

—Allajah says that unoriginal videos show that the artists don’t care about their fans. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

—Not only the videos, but sometimes the rhymes themselves seem to be about the same things: hard knocks in the ghetto before life gets better in the form of cars and women. Do you feel that rappers are repeating the same tired subjects? Why or why not?

—What’s the most original music video you ever saw? What made it original?

### Roleplay:

Two students, playing Allajah and a friend. Allajah thinks most music videos are unoriginal and should try new approaches. The friend thinks they’re fine the way they are.

### Group activity:

Students can work in pairs or small groups. Tell the groups they are in charge of designing a new music video that does not have any of the following: scantily-clad women, expensive automobiles, and excessive displays of jewelry. Have the groups share and compare their ideas in a general discussion with the class.

## YOUTH, MATURITY, AND THE OPPOSITE SEX

In these articles, several writers discuss the connection between age and maturity, and how it affects their self-image and relationships.

## A Question of Control

The anonymous writer in “Younger Girls/Older Guys: I Want To Be Taken Care Of,” p. 6, has a penchant for going out with older guys. Right now she’s involved with Bobby, who, at 25, is eight years her senior. She freely admits that she likes being controlled by someone who is older.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Why does the writer like to date older

guys? What do you think of the reasons she gives?

—The writer says she likes the feeling of being controlled by an older man because it makes her feel “cared for.” Do you think that’s a healthy or positive way to feel cared for? Why or why not?

—When it comes to going out with someone, do you think about the person’s age? Why or why not?

—What could be some of the advantages of going out with someone older? The disadvantages?

### Roleplay:

Two students, playing the writer and a friend. The friend thinks the writer should look for a relationship where she’s an equal, instead of being controlled. The writer thinks there’s nothing wrong about going out with a guy who controls her.

## Maturity Doesn’t Come with Age

In “Looking for Maturity,” p. 7, the anonymous writer describes how she is turned off by the immaturity of guys her own age and starts going out with older guys. But when she dates a guy who’s six years older, he turns out to be suspicious and controlling, and the relationship ends. The writer thinks the age gap was a big part of the problem. In a related article on p. 7 (“Cause for Concern?”), Colleen Langone interviews a therapist about the dangers to girls of going out with an older guy.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Are girls generally more mature than guys who are the same age? If so, why do you think that is? If not, why not?

—Have you ever dated someone much older or much younger? What was the experience like? Would you do it again? Why or why not?

—Do you feel that most girls who go out with older guys have family problems or lack strong father figures? Why or why not?

—How can you tell if a person is mature?

—Are most older guys in relationships trying to take advantage of the girl? Why or why not?

### Group activity:

Students can work in pairs or small groups. Tell the groups they are to define what makes a person mature. Have the groups share and compare their definitions in a general discussion with the class.



Gary Smith / M.J. Harrattan

## Prematurely Old?

On p. 9, Allajah Young in "Not As Old As You Think" writes about the pros and cons of being seen as mature for her age. Sometimes she has to "dumb herself down" or hide her true identity to fit in with her peers. But it's also nice to be treated more like an adult than a kid.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Have you ever been mistaken for younger or older than you are? Why did people make that mistake? How did you feel about people being mistaken about your age?

—Do you prefer the feeling of being more mature than your age, or less mature than your age? Why?

—Sometimes Allajah has to be silly with other kids or hide what she knows in order to fit in with them. Was there a time you had to hide who you were or act in a false way to fit in with others? How did you act? Why did you have to act that way to fit in? Would you do the same thing now? Why or why not?



Allajah Young

—Have you ever felt the pressure to pretend you were less intelligent than you really were? Did you give into that pressure? Why or why not?

—Allajah is 16, but is considered an "old soul." Do people think that about you? Why or why not?

### Roleplay:

Two students, playing Allajah and a friend. Allajah explains to her friend that she has to act less intelligent than she really is to fit in. The friend thinks Allajah should be herself and not care what others think.

## A Wild Ride

And on p. 16, Marianna Rybak in "Riding

in Cars With Boys" describes how she got in a car with two strange boys in order to "seem cool" and ended up being virtually kidnapped for the evening. She gets home safe, a little bit wiser.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Why did Marianna get in the car with the boys?

—Would you have gotten in the car? Why or why not?

—If you got in the car and realized the boys weren't going to take you home, would you have handled the situation in the same as Marianna or differently? Explain.

—Looking back, Marianna finds it hard to explain her actions. Have you been in situations where, looking back, you find it hard to explain your behavior? What did you learn from the experiences?

—Should Marianna have reported the boys to the police for kidnapping? Why or why not?

—In the future, Marianna says she'd rather be safe than cool. What do you think of her decision?

## THE IMPACT OF DIVORCE

### The Shock of a New Family

In "Family Ties," p. 20, the anonymous writer describes how her life was affected by her parents' divorce when she was 6. She splits visitation between her mother and father, and has confusing and sometimes difficult relationships with her new stepmother, stepsister, and half-brother.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Why is it hard for the writer to feel com-



Gary Smith / Linda Rodriguez

fortable with her new stepmom, brother, and sister?

—Have you ever, like the writer, felt rejected by one side of your family? Why did you feel that way and how did it affect you?

—The writer feels closer to her mother than her father. To whom do you feel closer? Why?

—If you were the writer's father, how would you have handled the situation when the other children began teasing the writer?

—Differences in religion kept the writer apart from her stepmom and siblings. What causes divisions in your family? How does your family deal with these divisions?

### Group activity:

Students can work in pairs or small groups. Tell the groups they are social workers assigned to the writer's family. They are to come up with ideas to open up communication and to increase respect between the two sides of the family. Have the groups share and compare their ideas in a general discussion with the class.



**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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