



Tips for Teachers

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

March 2004

STORIES YOU CAN USE TO HAVE DISCUSSIONS ABOUT PEER PRESSURE

Street Connections on page 2: "Do you care what other people think about you?"

This month's question and the nine answers are a quick way to get your class or group to explore the extent to which they are influenced by the opinions of others. Tell them they are going to see how other teens answered this question, but first you want them to write their own 2-3 sentence responses to it. Read the question and give them just two minutes to write their own answers.

Then read have the group read the responses on page 2. Which ones match their own feelings? Did any of the responses prompt them to rethink theirs? Do any seem very unconvincing or persuasive? You might want to point out three of the more nuanced answers. David Bartholomew says "sort of" and then says that his self-assurance is partly a result of paying attention to others' views. Ernie Jolly tries to resist responding to others but he is not always successful. Monique Crawford volunteers that she used to be swayed by others but now she isn't.

If you want to pursue this topic further you can ask the group what areas of their lives are influenced by others or not influenced. They are sure to bring up things they have some control over: clothes and other appearance factors like hair style, music tastes and

other entertainment choices, friends, their standing in school, etc. But there might be other aspects of their lives which affect how people regard them but over which they have less control: looks, race, where they live, their parents, sexual orientation, etc.

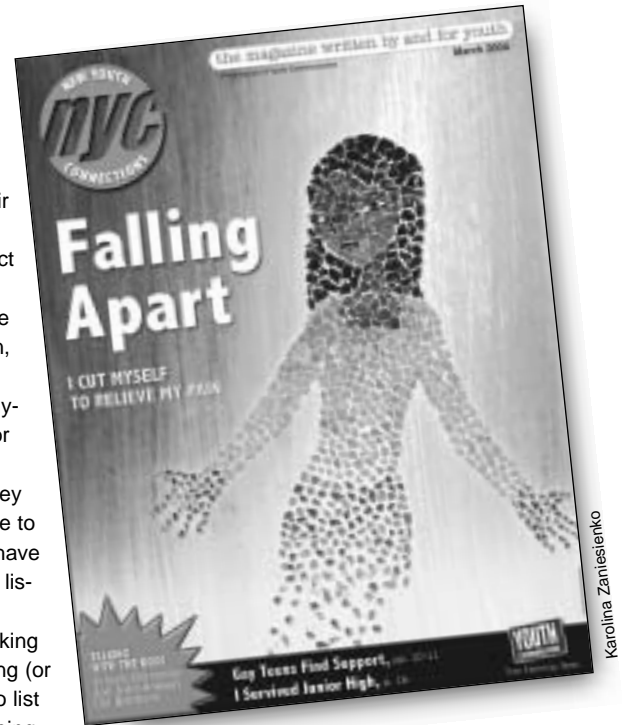
Ask them if they have ever done anything they regret to win the acceptance or good opinion of others, like using drugs, having sex, not studying, etc. Or have they ever done something positive in response to peer pressure, such as study for a test, have sex, lose weight, change a clothes style, listen to a different kind of music, etc.

You can finish this discussion by talking about the tradeoffs involved in going along (or going against) the crowd. Ask students to list some benefits of going along (such as being accepted by the group) and some drawbacks (such as doing things for others instead of yourself). Similarly, there are benefits of going against the crowd (being true to yourself) and drawbacks (being ostracized by the group).

Engage the students in a discussion about the pros and cons of going along or going against the crowd. (You don't need to express an opinion about which is better; the goal of this discussion is simply to help students become more conscious of peer pressure and how it operates.)

Note: There are two other stories in the issue which deal with the struggle to be yourself. "School of Misery" on page 16 is about one "misfit's" problems trying (and failing miserably) to fit in during middle school—even though he remains true to himself. It's a good story to ask the question: Was it worth it, or should he have just given in?

"I Don't Want to Hide" on page 10 looks at a slightly different issue: a student is different in a way he cannot control (he's gay). He could hide it, but he could never deny that part of



Karolina Zambiesienko

himself. Again, this raises the question: should he try to hide his gay side, or should he show it, even if it's a big risk?

FITTING IN VS. BECOMING MY OWN PERSON

In *School of Misery* (p. 16) Adam Wacholder details his grueling journey from his middle school outcast state to being a well-adjusted high schooler with healthy self-confidence.

Summary: During middle school, Adam tries desperately to fit in, but his clothes and his association with a fellow outcast plunge him into social hell. He feigns illness to stay at home, daydreams through class to escape his surroundings, and eventually flunks out of his school's elite gifted program. He finally gains a measure of self-respect by learning how to play the clarinet well. He carries this self-confidence

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

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

Writing Contest

Encourage your students to enter this month's Writing Contest, which offers \$175 in prizes, p. 2:

“If you could live in a book, movie or TV show, what would it be and why?”

Feel free to simply encourage students to enter this contest on their own.

However, you may also use the contest as a teaching opportunity. The following suggestions can help you help your students understand that their writing will be better (and they'll have a better chance of winning) if they develop a strategy before they start writing. (For many students, having a strategy also makes the writing easier, because they have a general idea of where they want to go.) Here are a few things students can think about before they start writing:

Audience: Remind them they are writing for a real audience: the teen writers at Youth Communication who judge the entries. It will help if they should pick a work which most teens are familiar with. If you are teaching a writing class you could use this point to open a discussion on how most writers adjust their approach depending on the audience. (If someone is planning to write about being a character in a Shakespeare play, they will have to provide more explanation and background than if they pick a popular TV show or movie.)

Why? Ask students if they can guess the most important word in the writing prompt. (It's "why.") The book,

movie or TV show they choose is much less important than their description of why they'd like to live there. To get them think about where they'd like to "live," it may help if first they can write down two or three sentences about who they are and what they like, such as "The thing I want most in the world is..." or "I would give anything to be..." or "The three adjectives I want people to use to describe me are..."

At the end of the exercise they would have identified one or more values or goals (love, wealth, family, fame, athletic greatness, social justice). From there they can choose to live in a book, etc., which would help them obtain their values or become the person they think they want to be. This process might help them write a simple but effective opening sentence: "I want to stop innocent people from being thrown in jail so I would like to be a defense lawyer in "The Practice."

Be different. Go against expectations. Try humor. An eye-catching entry might open with "I would love to live in The Lord of The Rings so I could help Sauron wipe out those annoying hobbits." Or they could pick a show they hate and enter it as a new character who makes the show exciting.

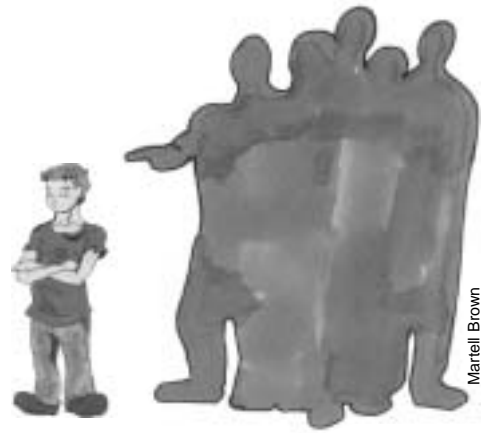
Deadline:

March 22, 2004

AWARDS FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Youth Communication is sponsoring its 6th 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.



into high school where he has the courage to grow his hair long, wear tie-dyed shirts, and in general accept himself for who he is.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Adam start feeling better about himself in junior high? Has learning a skill or doing well at something ever made you feel better about yourself?

2. Could Adam have done anything else in junior high school to make his life better or to be more accepted by the classmates who were tormenting him? Change his clothes? Keep up with the latest gadgets? Stop hanging around with other outcasts? Or was he forever doomed once he became labeled? Have you ever been in a bad situation at school which you felt hopeless to change? How did you react? Did you pretend to be sick to stay at home or daydream through classes to forget about your woes? Did your grades suffer?

3. No one at his junior high steps forward to help him or make friends. Have you ever befriended someone at school who was being ridiculed by others?

4 Adam mentions clothes, gadgets, and being associated with other outcasts as things which defined him as undesirable. What aspects of your life define you? Have people ever thought you were not worth having as a friend because of the clothes you wore or the people around you?



5. For all his torment and torture Adam never mentions being physically bullied. He also never starts fights with his persecutors. Do you think this is odd?

Vocabulary words in story:

transitional
lineage
ridicule
dormant
secluded
degrading
deviant
manipulation
concocted
exceptionally
branding
loathe

Miscellaneous

On the Razor's Edge, page 3.

In this story a young woman begins cutting herself after her father discovers she is having sex and shuts her out of his life. She loves the feeling but her mother gets her into therapy. She manages to stop mutilating herself, partly because of the therapy and partly because her parents' separation creates a happier home life for her.



Note: Cutting is fairly common among teenage girls (we always seem to have several girls at Youth Communication who have been cutters). You may have girls in your classes who cut, or who used to cut. And you will almost certainly have girls who know of girls who cut. They probably won't reveal this to you.

In reading the story please keep in mind that you want to direct some of the discussion toward how the writer got help. (She goes to a therapist, along with her mother, among other things. There is also an interview with a psychologist which accompanies the story.) You may want to mention that the writer has not cut since August 2003.

Activities

Discussion: Before you give out the magazine tell your students they will read a story about a young woman cutting herself. You might even want to read aloud the first two paragraphs under the subhead "The First Cut" on page 4 which describe the first time she abuses herself in this way. Ask them what events might have caused her to start cutting herself. (Discord in her family seems to be the main cause, which is described in detail on page 3.)

Writing: After they read the story have them write a letter to the writer to express their feelings about her situation. Or they can write a letter to her mother and/or father. The letters can offer advice, express their sympathy, etc. You might want to suggest that every letter mention the fact that the writer has now stopped and give her support for that action.



Interview with Chancellor Joel Klein

Two NYC writers, Caitlin Lemmo and Luce Tang, interviewed Department of Education Chancellor Joel Klein about school safety, overcrowding, funding for the schools, and other topics. His comments are woven into several stories that deal with those topics and more. A good place to start this section is "Talking to the Boss," page 5, where Caitlin describes how she got the interview and her nervousness about conducting it.

You could also have students look at the story, "Joel Klein: A Guy from Queens[TITLE]," p. 6. Students may be surprised to see that the Chancellor grew up in public housing and went to Bryant HS in Queens. It doesn't say so in the article, but Klein gave up a very, very lucrative job as head of a big corporation (probably paying more than \$1 million a year) to become Chancellor. You might ask students why they think he would do that.

Here are some of the topics covered in the stories. You might want to have your students read the ones that focus on issues that are most pressing at your school.

School Safety: One story is "Life at One of the Dangerous Dozen" on page 7. Hattie Rice—who attends one of the twelve schools which the Chancellor has labeled "most danger-



reveal something which their parents did not know. We printed some of the letters on pages 18-19. These are heartfelt and revealing letters that will be sure to spark responses in your students.

A simple lesson: Ask the students to read all of the letters (or as many as you have time for). While reading, they should circle lines or paragraphs that are powerful to them.

When they're done, go around the room and have students read aloud the

sections they've circled. As they read (or at the end) ask if other students can understand the feelings or situations described, how they would deal with them, what advice they would give to the writer, etc. This can lead to a rich discussion about parent/child relations.

Hispanic Identity

Not too many years ago, if you were a Latino New Yorker you were probably Puerto Rican. Today, however, the City's Hispanic population is a diverse mix of Dominicans,

Colombians, Bolivians, Mexicans, Chileans, Panamanians, Ecuadorians, and many others. Some older New Yorkers (including some teachers) haven't caught up to this diversity.

Janill Briones, who's Ecuadorian, is asked by her principal to participate in the Puerto Rican Day parade ("Don't Call Me Puerto Rican," p. 9). Janill respects Puerto Ricans, but she feels special pride in her Ecuadorian heritage. She's also quite knowledgeable about her home country (and about Puerto Rico too). Any immigrant who's been asked, "Are you [Puerto Rican, Indian, Filipino, etc. etc.]" can relate to Janill's story.

Janill's essay is also an excellent model for writing about one's racial/ethnic/national history, which your students might be able to copy. Here's the basic outline:

1. Begin with an anecdote about being confused with another ethnic group.
2. Describe a bit about the group you are actually part of, including how that group lives in New York, a few anecdotes about life in the home country, and some facts about the home country (location, population, etc.)
3. Compare your group with another similar group.
4. Close with a description of what you like about being part of your group.

ous"—describes what is being done to make schools safer and offers some recommendations of her own.

Ask your students if they feel safe at their school. What, if anything, worries them? What would they do, if anything, to make it safer? After reading the article ask them to list two or three of the strategies being implemented to make schools safer. Do they think they will work? Do they have suggestions that don't appear in the article?

FOR SPARK COUNSELORS & ADVISORY TEACHERS

Short Takes: Letters to Parents

In last issue's writing contest we asked readers to write letters to their parents and

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 youth-comm.org to see our complete publication catalog.



Kenly Dillard