



Tips for Teachers

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

March 2005

A NOTE ABOUT THIS 25TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

This year marks Youth Communication's 25th anniversary of publishing *New Youth Connections*. This month we mark the anniversary by including several stories from the past—going all the way back to 1980. Our current teen writers selected stories that interested them. The teens also interviewed several alumni writers to see where they are now. For more information about the stories in this issue and why they were selected, see the introduction to the issue, on page 2.

IMMIGRANT STORIES— The Challenge of Adapting to American Life

Two stories deal with challenges recent immigrant youth have adjusting to school and life in America in general, "Tongue Tied" and "A New World Full of Strangers."

In "Tongue-Tied," p. 19, Amy Huang describes the challenges she encounters on coming to the U.S. from China at age 9. She's teased by classmates—even Chinese-American ones—because she can't speak English, and is stressed out

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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having to translate for her parents.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

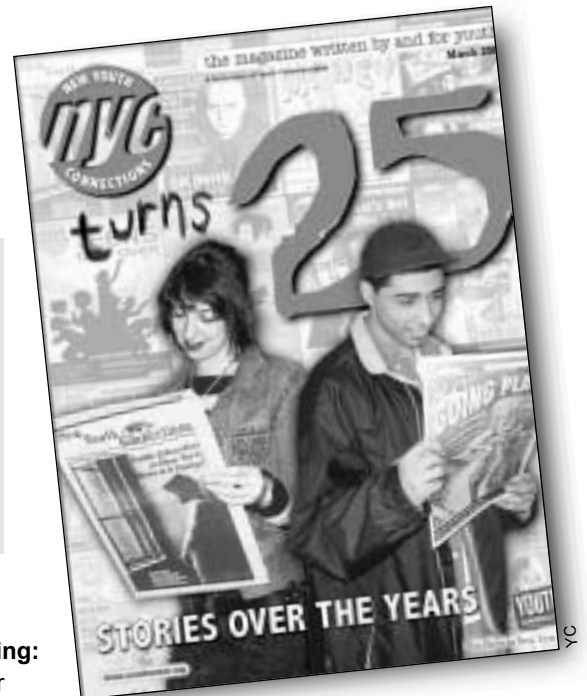
- Did you ever feel distant from or rejected by others because you didn't know English well or couldn't do something as well as everyone else? How did it feel and what did you do about it?

- Did you ever join a group of your peers who were taunting or harassing someone outside or different from your group? Did it make you feel good?

- Amy's friends are Chinese like her, but they still tease her. Why do you think they did that? Is it worse to be betrayed by someone from the same culture or background? Why or why not?

- Amy's parents tell her to "stay away" from the kids who tease her. Amy thinks that is useless advice. What would have been a better thing for her parents to say or do to help Amy deal with the teasing? Could anyone else have helped Amy?

- Amy gets irritated having to translate for her non-English speaking parents. Are there things you have to do for your parents that bother you?



- Amy slowly becomes Americanized by "watching baseball and eating hamburgers and hot dogs." How have you become Americanized? Or if you were born here, what is your reaction to Amy's definition of "becoming Americanized"?

In 1987 Edwidge Danticat wrote a story for *New Youth Connections* about coming from Haiti to New York as a 12-year-old and the taunting she suffered when she went to school ("A New World Full of Strangers" on page 18). You can use the first two questions from the above lesson about "Tongue-Tied." (You may also want to tell your students that Edwidge has become a prominent writer; one of her novels was selected for Oprah's Book Club and was a *New York Times* best seller.)

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

Letters to Parents, pp. 22-24

Discussion and Writing: Read the letters and ask your students to choose their favorite letter to discuss. As they tell why they liked the letter, write key reasons/ characteristics of their favorites on the board. The reasons will probably range from empathy with particular problems (absentee parents, abuse) or important decisions or discoveries about themselves (enlisting, rejection of traditional female roles). They may also talk about liking the courage or honesty of the writer, or the way the person communicated what was on their mind.

After your discussion, have your students write their own letters. Give them a choice of two letters they can write.

1) They can write a letter to one of the teens whose letter is published in NYC,

telling them what they thought about their letter or how it affected them.

2) Or they can write their own letter to their parents. You might consider sending us a class set and we can print a few in our Letters to the Editor section in the upcoming issue. (To protect the teens' privacy we will change names or you can blot or cut them out before you send them.)

Two Lessons You Can Use With "The Man in the Glass" page 14

1) A Writing Lesson

Goal: 1) Make it easier for your students to start writing. 2) To have students write several paragraphs which include concrete details. 3) To help students see the value of using concrete details in their writing.

Lesson

Everyone has trouble getting started sometimes, especially when it comes to writing. You may have a topic you enjoy or a story you want to tell but where and how do you start?

One way to start a story is to think about "things." What objects are associated with the story you are trying to tell? What part of the story do they show up in? Who touches them or uses them? What feelings and thoughts do they evoke?

NYC writers sometimes use this strategy. Several years ago a student wrote a story about the disabled uncle. Her title? "My Uncle's Chair." She used the chair as a prop to tell the story of her invalid relative and how he quietly occupied his favorite chair every day.

Jessica Feliciano does something like this to start her story on her alcoholic father ("The Man in the Glass"). Her tale begins with one simple detail: a can of beer captured in a photo. Not just any can of beer but the one her father sported in seemingly all family photos. This simple reference to a common object draws the reader into the story. You can imagine her father downing drink after drink at family affairs. It is a far more effective opening than something like "My father is an alcoholic."

Ask your students to write a short description of a family member. First they should make a list of objects they commonly associate with this relative or an object which was part of a dramatic episode in this relative's life. They must use one or more of items on the list to help describe the relative. (Limit students to one page. And tell them to squeeze in as many of the objects as they can. They will be surprised how much more interesting their writing becomes when it is packed with proper nouns.)

Help them along by giving them suggestions, perhaps on the board. For example, a sibling might be associated with a radio, books, a piece of favorite clothing, the couch he or she sat on all day, a piece of athletic equipment. Objects linked to parents or other adults might include the same list plus some more adult items like a car, kitchen equipment, religious artifacts.

You may also suggest some opening lines. "Whenever I think of my sister I think

Writing Contest

page 2 \$175 in Prizes
Deadline: March 21, 2005

"Have you ever betrayed or been betrayed by a friend?"

Pre-writing discussion: If possible, use a warm-up that links this contest to your curriculum by asking your students if they can name any famous betrayers from literature or history (e.g., Judas, Brutus, Benedict Arnold, Louis Farrakhan), or a popular culture (e.g., Survivor contestants, professional athletes who switch teams, rappers who leave the hood, Hollywood stars who cheat on their husbands or wives, et al.).

Then ask them to give some general examples of betrayal. You will probably hear things like two-timing a boyfriend or girlfriend, divulging embarrassing information one was given in confidence, breaking a promise, etc. As an aside you might ask them if betrayal is always wrong. Is it wrong to break a promise not to tell anyone that your friend is doing drugs or cheating her way through high school? What if the

friend said she's thinking of killing herself, but made you promise not to tell anyone?

Before they start writing you may want to suggest some prompts: (You can write these on the board or on a handout.)

—"I'll never forget the day I found out..."

—"I cannot believe that my friend could..."

—"I still don't know why I..."

Suggest that their essay can have these parts

1. Life before the betrayal (or before the discovery of being betrayed)
2. The decision to betray and the details of the actual betrayal or the details of how the writer found out about the betrayal
3. The immediate consequences
4. The long term impact

of her tennis racket. She is a great athlete." "My brother never leaves the house without his Atlanta Braves baseball cap." "My father's after shave lotion used to stink up the house. One time it made me sick."

Collect and read the papers. Select several of the most interesting pieces and read them aloud in the next class. Ask the students to comment on what makes the pieces so interesting (to drive home the point that concrete details make for more vivid writing).

2) A Lesson About Alcoholism

Goal: Help students understand what alcoholism is and recognize it in their own families. Help students understand it's not their fault. Help legitimize treatment.

Plot: Jessica's father is an alcoholic and neglects her. At times, she blames herself. She also tries to get her father to get into treatment, which he does. The treatment helps them open up to each other.

Lesson

A. Warm up Discussion

Background on alcoholism: Ask the teens what they know about alcoholism. They'll give lots of responses. Through questions and comments, let them know that it's not just drinking an occasional beer. It's drinking to the point that you put drinking before other things, like taking care of your kids, being safe in the car, treating people well in the family. (Note: some students will recognize family members with this description.)

Then, if no one has mentioned it, tell them that alcoholism is like a disease. And like diseases, it doesn't just take willpower to conquer it. It usually takes treatment.

Getting help: Ask students: "When a man has a problem, should he: ask for help, such as counseling; solve it himself; or keep it secret.?" You'll get various responses, ranging from "get help" to "a real man never admits he has a problem." Let these answers just sit in the room. The students may disagree with each other, which is fine. But keep your comments neutral, or gently probing. Don't reveal your own opinion on this, and don't let the discussion go on too far. This is just to get the kids thinking about the courage and humility it may take to seek help. (In a few

minutes, while reading the story, they'll see a proud man seek and benefit from treatment.)

B. Read story

Questions you may want to ask as you go along: In the first few paragraphs: What does the father put first, his drinking or his daughter? Is that right? (Let kids vent a bit about how hurtful this is.)

Note: the father *denies* he has a problem. Ask the kids, "Does the father think or admit he has a problem?" Why or why not?



Alison Thomson

You may also want to ask the group, "What other kinds of problems do people deny having?" (e.g., drug problem, anger management problem, reading problem, etc.). "How can you help someone who denies they have the problem in the first place?" (This question mainly acknowledges that denial is common, and that it's pretty tough to penetrate.)

Denial: Ask the students: "Even though the father denies he has a problem, what's the evidence in the story that he does?" (skipping parent meetings, family history, becoming like his father, suspended from job, etc.)

Ask the students to point out where the father stops being in denial. Ask: Is this good? Might it lead to change? What kinds of changes might it lead to in the family? Between the father and daughter? (Let them speculate a bit, then say, "Let's see what happens.")

C. Role Play

Characters: Jessica and her father.

Conflict: Jessica and her father want to repair their relationship, but don't know how. Tell the students: To begin the role play, Jessica should tell her father that she has felt unloved. He should respond by telling her how he really feels about her, and explain why he hasn't shown it.

Continue: They both talk about what they can do to repair their relationship.

Possible Prompts: For the father: I always saw my dad drinking; My dad never showed me the love I wanted; I'm proud of you for _____. For Jessica: I was scared to tell you how I felt; it hurt that you put your drinking first; I'm sorry I nagged at you, but I didn't know what else to do....

End: Ask the students, do they think that Jessica's father will stay sober? Why or why not? If not, what should Jessica do (e.g., give up on him? insist he get back in the program? etc.)

Alternative/additional activity—Writing Prompt & Discussion

Divide the group in half. Tell them that one group is the father, and one group is Jessica. Remind them that they have to write as if they are the character. Tell students you are going to read the two prompts that were in the story:

"I never understood why you..." and "It makes me angry when you..."

All of the "Jessicas" should respond as she would respond (or as a son would respond, if they are a boy). All of the "fathers" should respond as they think a father would. There are already some responses in the story, of course, but they should expand on them.

Give students about 3-5 minutes to respond to each prompt. Then go around the room, asking students to read what they've written.

Wrap Up: Ask the students, "What do these answers tell us about how fathers and daughters could get along better?" Basically, students will say they should communicate more. Ask them what makes it hard to communicate. End by asking, "Is there anything that you think teens themselves could do to improve communication?" (Here's where they will realize a few things they might try at home, and will see that other kids think taking a risk to improve communication is worth it.)

Note: This story may prompt teens to reveal that their parents have alcohol problems. It may prompt others to talk about missing their fathers. Using your judgment, you can talk with them to reassure them that the problem is not their fault, to assess the extent of the problem (“What does he do when he’s drunk that you don’t like?”), and then ask them what they think their options are, e.g., How can they make the best of the situation and feel safe; and is there anything they think they might be able to do, such as encourage the parent to get into an employer or union treatment plan, as Jessica did. (These should be private conversations, after class.)

Single and Lovin’ It—Role-Play and Discussion About Dating

Goal: Help girls realize that having a boyfriend is a choice, not an obligation. To normalize not having a boyfriend.

Plot: As a child, Latrice assumes that one thing that will come along with becoming a teenager is a boyfriend. But when she becomes a teen, she decides that having a boyfriend is not what she wants. She’s teased by some people, but holds her ground.

A. Warm up

Pass around pieces of paper (you can rip 8 ½ x 11 sheets into four smaller scraps). Tell the students the topic of the story and discussion today is “Boyfriends: Who Needs Them?” On one side of their paper, they should write a couple reasons why having a boyfriend can be a positive experience. (They’ll write things like someone to talk to, someone to tell you nice things, someone to do things with, etc. They may also write salacious comments—you need to decide how you’ll respond to those based on your comfort level and experience with the class.)

On the other side of the paper they should write reasons why one would not want to have a boyfriend, or the advantages of not being in a relationship. (They’ll write about being two-timed, being controlled, limiting yourself to one person, etc.)

Go around the room. First have everyone read the positives. You can gen-

tly prod them, challenge them, etc., and let them make comments about the comments too. It’s fine to get into a bit of a discussion or disagreement about these points.

Then have everyone read the negatives. Again, try to stimulate discussion and even disagreement about the comments.

B. Read story

Possible stopping points: After ¶ 2: Why is she glad? After ¶ 4: How might a boyfriend limit her ability to do whatever, whenever she pleased? (Note her list of problems: pregnancy; ruin friendship; hurt grades.)

C. Discussion

After you finish reading the story, ask if anyone wants to add anything to their list of positive and negative aspects of having a boyfriend. Pick up on some of the negatives, e.g., “He’s too controlling,” and ask, “How might you deal with that?”

The goal of this part of the discussion is for the girls to share information about how they can make the relationships they are in more satisfying, and for boys to learn more about what girls want in a relationship and to become more respectful of that. (This also allows the more assertive girls to help “coach” the less assertive girls about how to get more of what you want in a relationship.)

D. Role play

Characters: Latrice, and a friend (friend can be a boy or a girl)

Conflict: The friend wants to hook up Latrice with a cute boy she knows. Latrice thinks getting involved with a boy right now is wrong for her.

Students will use the arguments from the story, and from the “positive” and “negative” comments they’ve made. Remind them that they’ve heard lots of pro and con arguments just in the past 20 minutes.

E. Wrap Up

Ask: Would anyone consider not dating or even kissing a boy as long as

Latrice? Why or why not? Or ask a less personal version of the question: “Is Latrice crazy for not dating for so long, or is she doing the right thing for herself?”

Many of the students will acknowledge that if that’s what Latrice wants, that’s OK for her. (This sends a powerful message to some of the girls in the room who feel they will be disrespected if they don’t date, especially when there can seem to be so much peer pressure to do so.)

Additional Notes

Some readers may think that Latrice is afraid of boys and/or intimacy, and think that she’s not being completely honest about her fears. Others may think that she’s seen her mom with lots of boyfriends, and was put off by it. Or there may be other interpretations. That’s fine. No matter what opinion a teen gives of Latrice and her motives, the opinion itself is not important. What’s important is the teen’s *reasoning*. So, for example, if

someone says, “I think she’s just afraid of boys,” simply ask, “What in the story makes you think that?” Life without a boyfriend is fine for Latrice Davis, despite some unfavorable reactions from her mother and friends. Her article turns a popular stereotype on its head: supposedly, if a girl can’t “get” a

guy she’s a loser, with too little personality or self-confidence to date successfully.

But Latrice is happy, self-confident, and courageous—she’s dateless by choice. Her self-worth is not dependent on being in a relationship with a boy. How many girls can truthfully say that? How many girls (and boys) are in relationships not because they really want to be, but because they’re scared not to be?

Do any of your students share her wariness about involvement? Do they think girls are more pressured than boys to date? Is more of their self-esteem tied up with dating? Do parents pressure their children to date (consciously or unconsciously) because they fear their children may be “different” or unhappy if they are not dating?



Victor Aviles