



# Tips for Teachers

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

March 2006

## Summer Writing Workshops

### News for you

Later this month we'll send *New Youth Connections* teacher/distributors information on our 27<sup>th</sup> annual summer writing workshop for teens. Look for it—and please pass the application form along to young people who you think would like to write for *New Youth Connections*. The workshop will run five hours a day, four days a week, from early July through mid-August. Participants will receive intensive writing and research training while working closely with our experienced, full-time instructional staff. All instruction is based on writing stories for the fall 2006 issues of *New Youth Connections*. (We also offer a workshop for young people in foster care.)

This is an incredible opportunity for teens to improve their writing skills and to write stories that will help their peers.

In addition to the mailing, detailed information and applications for the workshops will be available at [www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org) by April 1.

**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:  
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### More News

#### Welcome to new *New Youth Connections* editor

Katia Hetter joined the staff a few months ago. Prior to that, she covered City Hall for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the redevelopment of Ground Zero for *Newsday* and the Supreme Court for *U.S. News & World Report*. She has freelanced for *The New York Times*, *American Lawyer* and *Curve* magazine. She has a BA from Pomona College and a Masters in Public Policy from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

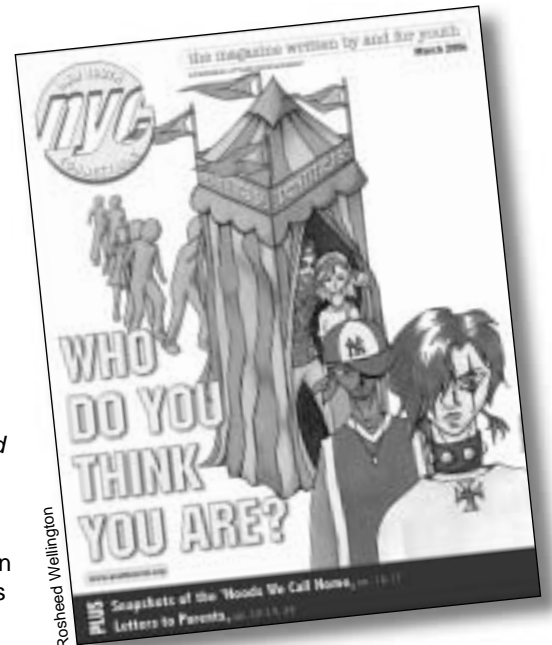
### This Issue's Theme: IDENTITY

The main developmental job of adolescence is separating from family and forging an identity. In this issue, several writers describe their efforts to create identities that work for them. You can use them to spark discussion and writing. These teens offer role models and strategies for your students in their struggle to develop their own identities.

### Discussing Ideas on Identity: Racial Identity

"Coloring Outside the Lines," by Desiree Bailey, p. 3.

When Desiree becomes the only black girl in her 7<sup>th</sup> grade class she suddenly becomes acutely aware of being black. She feels pressure to represent "the race," not just herself. She also begins listening to rock music (which is ridiculed by a friend). At the same time, she endures ignorant comments from her non-black



peers. The pressure leads Desiree to become hypercritical of black teens.

However, one day a black friend confesses to Desiree she hates herself because of her black skin. Desiree is shocked, and seeing a version of her own views reflected back at her makes Desiree realize that her attitudes have become "poisoned." She vows to change and become more accepting of herself and other black people.

*Discussion suggestion:* Have students read just the first page of this story (all of page 3). Stop them before they continue and ask them to predict what happens next. Will the writer become even more intolerant of her black peers? Or will she change in some way? What might spur her to change? Why? If she changes, will it just be a matter of changing her mind? Or will it take a while? What would be convincing evidence of her change [e.g., listening to different music or reading different books].

Then have students read the end of

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[www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org)

the story (top of p. 4) and compare their predictions with what happened. What do they think of Desiree's change? Are they convinced? Why or why not? What do they think Desiree means when she says, "I couldn't let my fears decide my behavior or tastes anymore"?

## "Bad at Math" Identity (pass this along to the math department!)

If you're getting NYC, you're probably not a math teacher, but math teachers will surely appreciate Mileyda Evangelista's story on p. 9, "Solving My Math Problem." Mileyda is not good at math. But she seeks help, starts studying, seeks more help, and studies harder. She is surprised to find that her efforts pay off. She even thinks that math is "pretty cool." Math teachers everywhere will want to copy this story for their students.

## Cowboy Identity

"*Brokeback Breaks Hearts—and Stereotypes*" by David Schmutzer on page 8 and "*The Will & Grace in Me*" by Eric Green on page 15. Movies, TV shows, songs and other products of popular culture can send positive or negative messages about how people live. These two writers describe how a movie and a TV show offer positive depictions of gay men. Can your students think of shows or movies that offered them good or bad views of themselves?

## Conformist Identity

The anonymous writer of "Thinking for Myself," p. 10-11, is afraid that she'll become a typical clothes-obsessed, image-obsessed teen girl. But she also wants to rebel against the strict confines of her religion—and wearing fashionable, immodest clothes is an easy way to do that. She becomes very confused about who she is. She implements a radical solution: she runs away from her home, her religion, and from media-obsessed New York to live with a punk/progressive crowd in Denver, Colorado.

When she returns a year later (to finish high school) she no longer shaves her legs and she feels immune to the onslaught of advertising in the trains. She resists her mother's pressure to conform. Questions to ask your students:

—The writer says that advertising and her parents are pressuring her to conform to something that doesn't feel right to her. Have they ever felt uncomfortable pres-

sure to conform (from parents, peers, advertising, etc.) Did they resist? Give in? How do they feel about their decision now?

—The writer is particularly harsh on advertising. What do your students think about ads? Do they feel manipulated by them? Pressured to conform, or to buy things to fit in? When they watch TV or read magazines, are they annoyed by the ads, or do they pay more attention to the ads than to the shows or stories? Why?

## Identity Experiment

In "The Identity Experiment," p. 22-23, Lily Mai spends a day in each of five different outfits: Girly Girl, Goth, Clubbing in the

Village, Hip Hop, and "normal." Each outfit makes her feel different, and the reactions she gets on the street add another layer to her feelings. Here are some questions you can ask student to consider when they read this story:

—Why do your students think Lily agreed to try this experiment?

—Would they try it themselves? Why or why not?

—What do they think of the reactions she got? Did anything surprise them?

—What does Lily learn from this experiment? [See the last six paragraphs.]

—Does changing the way you dress give you more control or less control over your identity?

# Writing Contest

page 2

Deadline: April 3, 2006

## "What's one mistake you're glad you made, and why?"

Purpose of lesson: Some people struggle to start writing assignments and put those first few words on paper. This activity will help students see the benefit of pre-writing activities like list making and reflection.

Pre-writing activity: Give your students Webster's definition of the word mistake: "A wrong action or statement proceeding from faulty judgment, inadequate knowledge, or inattention." You can put it on the board.

First ask them to think of their lives as compartments: family, school, dating, church, recreation, job, athletics, buying things, health, traveling, etc. You can ask them to write down their own lists or put them on the board as part of a discussion.

Then ask them what phrases they associate with making mistakes:

I forgot to \_\_\_\_\_

I didn't \_\_\_\_\_

I did the wrong \_\_\_\_\_

I said the wrong \_\_\_\_\_

I used the wrong \_\_\_\_\_

I didn't listen to \_\_\_\_\_

I misjudged so-and-so, I lied, I trusted

I went the wrong way

I overslept, etc.

Between the "life categories" and the statements listed above, every student should be able to think of a mis-

take they made that turned out to have a silver lining.

The essay: Explain to the students that this essay has two parts: In the first part, they must explain the mistake and show why it seemed like such a big problem at the time. In the second part of the essay they need to show how the bad situation turned good. For example, the mistake might be hanging out with friends so much you fail 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but the response might be to break off from that crowd and get serious about school. Or a mistake could be insulting a new girl on the first day of school, but later becoming best friends. In any case, to be a winner, the essay should clearly describe the mistake and the emotions surrounding it (fear, humiliation, etc.) and how things turned out differently than expected in the end.

## Letters to the Writers

Some of your students might have personal reactions to some of this issue's identity stories. Encourage them to write letters to the writers. The letters can:

- agree or disagree with a point of view
- sympathize with the writer or take the writer to task for what she did or thinks
- identify with the writer because something similar happened to the student.

## Discussion Ideas

### Sex: Lots to Talk About?

"Let's Talk About Sex," by Anonymous, p. 6, is rich with statements and observations that can help open up healthy discussions about sex. They include:

1) **How should parents respond when they find out their teen is sexually active?** There are several possible responses mentioned in the story: a father approves and the teens get married; parents go mental and lock teen away for life; mom threatens to kill daughter; parents teach sexually active teen how to be safe; parents stalk boyfriend.

*Lesson idea:* Have students read the article and circle the statement they think best describes what *their* parents would do if they found out they were having sex. Have students also circle the statement closest to what they *wish* their parents would do. Discuss. (Focus the discussion on what they wish their parents would do and why. Is there any strategy that might help bring the parents around?)

2) **Are teens with strict parents more likely to have sex?** Some teens say that "teens with strict parents are more likely to have sex." But the writer points out that her mom is strict, and she doesn't plan to have sex.

*Lesson idea:* Debate—Are teens with strict parents more or less likely to have sex? Why or why not?

3) **Why don't parents want teens to have sex?** To protect their children, or to protect their own reputations?

*Lesson idea:* Debate—When parents tell teens they cannot have sex, are they more concerned with the health and well-being of their teen children, or their own reputation? When teens won't tell their parents they are having sex, are they trying to protect their parents from the pain of hearing difficult information, or are the teens trying to protect their reputation with their parents?

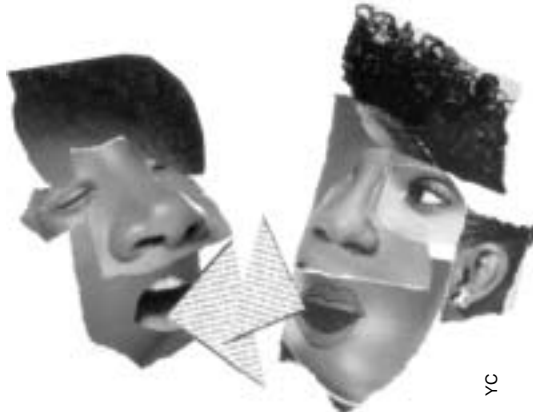
*Final discussion:* If teens are having sex, or planning to, should they tell their parents? Why or why not? What might be the benefits of confiding? What are the risks? How should they tell them? In person? Write a letter? Drop hints? Under what circumstances might teens tell or not tell? (For example, are some parents more approachable than others?). If a teen is not willing to tell his (or her) parents, should he/she wait until he/she moves out, as the writer plans to do? Why or why not?

## Writing Exercise:

### Describe a Place

Use the 5 stories collectively entitled "A Sense of Place" on pages 16 and 17.

**Objective:** Have your students write a description of their neighborhood. Step 1) Have students identify good descriptions.



Have your students read the stories. They are short, simple and well written. Depending on the time you have and the reading ability of your students, you can read aloud one of the longer ones, "Little Italy," (it takes about 3 minutes) or have the students silently read all of the stories.

While they read (or listen to you read) ask students to circle anything that stands out for them as particularly vivid descriptions...words, phrases, metaphors, etc.

#### Step 2) Pre-writing activity

After students have read the stories, go around the room asking them to read aloud the descriptions they circled in the

stories. Write their contributions on the board.

When students have shared this information, see if they can go a bit deeper, beyond words and phrases. For example, in "Little Italy" Tanisia focused on how church bells evoke a certain mood in her while in "Brownsville" April sees the local church—as rundown as it is—as a symbol of hope. In "Eastchester" Jade writes about trees and flowers as does Desiree in "Rosedale."

#### Step 3) Pre-writing activity

Ask students to look at the descriptions on the board. Do some of the descriptions apply to their own neighborhoods? If they close their eyes and picture their neighborhoods, what other images come to mind? *In general*, what image do they want to convey about their neighborhood? Is it in decline or growing? Quiet or bustling? Safe or dangerous? Clean or dirty? What images or symbols can they include that will show the reader how they see their neighborhood?

Give students 5 minutes to do two things: a) Write a first sentence which conveys the theme of their story. b) Make a list of items (descriptions) that will support their theme. Go around the room and have students read their first sentence and a couple supporting descriptions. (For example, "My neighborhood not safe." Speeding cars. Boys on corner. Abandoned building. Too many weapons.)

#### Step 4: Write the essay

Students should now be ready to write a first draft of their neighborhood description.

## ATTENTION ADVISORY TEACHERS

### Letters to Parents

Each year we run our contest, "Send us a letter you'd like to send to your parents, but don't think you can." And each year readers send heart-breaking letters about issues and experiences they've clearly never shared with parents. Here are some lesson ideas:

—If you have a very high level of trust with your students, use this assignment in your class. Have the teens read some of the letters on p. 18-19. Talk about the ground rules. For example, will the letters teens write in

class be shared with you? Or will they be totally private? Will students have the chance to read their letter, or an excerpt, to the class, if they choose?

—Ask students to read all of the letters and pick the one that stands out most for them. Have them write a response to the teen who wrote the letter, in which they share a similar experience, console the writer, or suggest something the writer could do next to better manage the challenge or feelings expressed in the letter.

## Practice Lesson for Regents Exam Listening Section

**Use story:** "Little Italy: Up Before Sunrise" p. 16

**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). 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.

NOTE: This lesson omits the report writing section of the Regents exam. It only contains the listening part.

### Step One: Read the Overview

(Note: During the real test the students have a printed version of the Overview in front of them as the proctor reads the story. If you can't make copies of the overview consider writing it or just read it to them.)

Read this to your students:

**Overview:** You will listen to an article written by a teenager about her neighborhood. You will then answer some multiple choice questions. You will hear the article twice. You may take notes.

**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 your notes. (Pause) Now I will read the story again."

### **Step Three: Multiple Choice Questions**

After reading the article for the second time give them the questions on the next page.

For answers to the exam email  
Tbrown@youthcomm.org

## Regents Listening Section "Little Italy" Story

### Multiple Choice Questions

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

**1) What would be another good title for this story?**

- a) Day After Day in the Neighborhood
- b) The Church Down the Block
- c) One Big Happy Neighborhood
- d) Streets of Hope

**2) What word best describes the writer's role in her neighborhood?**

- a) protector
- b) spectator
- c) street kid
- d) cheerleader

**3) The word "stagnant" in paragraph two most nearly means**

- a) hopeful
- b) curious
- c) stale
- d) unproductive

**4) For the writer the church in the story symbolizes**

- a) the continued Italian presence in the area
- b) daily routine
- c) hope for the hard working immigrants who live there
- d) all of the above

**5) How old is the writer?**

- a) 15
- b) 16
- c) 18
- d) can't tell from the story

**6) What best describes her neighborhood?**

- a) a mosaic with varied ethnic groups living close together but not interacting
- b) a ladder that helps immi-

- grants realize the American dream
- c) a grocery shelf with the same items stacked together
- d) a melting pot with lots of interaction among ethnic groups

**7) What aspect of street life does the writer not include in her story?**

- a) kids playing ball
- b) people going to work
- c) stores
- d) people going to church

**8) What is the main sign of change in the neighborhood for the writer?**

- a) different languages heard in the area
- b) different kinds of kids playing in the street
- c) more crowded streets
- d) changing store owners