



Tips for Teachers

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

March 2007

IN THIS ISSUE

Writing Contests —Cash Prizes

We have two writing contests in this issue.

If you submit a class set, be sure each essay has the student's name, address, age, school, etc. on it so we can contact them. (Students can e-mail essays to hvanderberg@youthcomm.org but they must include their full name and address).

Writing Contest #1 —A Secret Side of You

"Imagine there is a side to you that no one knows about...a personality that can do things you usually don't do. Describe this other you."

Deadline for entries: March 26, 2007

Warm-up discussion

Before you do any of the pre-writing activities, have a 5-minute discussion about the question. The idea is to get

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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students thinking about how common it is to project ourselves into other roles and identities. One possible introductory question: "Do you ever wish you were somebody else, somebody very different from who you are?"

Remind them that super-hero cartoons and movies abound with examples of "mild mannered" people who get to be colorful crusaders when they become the Hulk, Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman, etc. Also, many people create "alter egos" on the Web through playing Second Life (a simulation game where you can create a personality, build houses, own a business) playing the Sims, and creating MySpace accounts in which they pretend to be someone else.

Pre-writing Activity for Contest #1: Making Lists

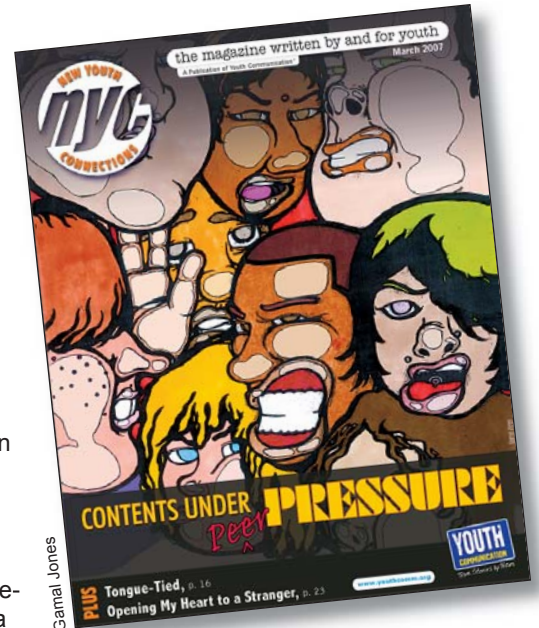
Before you meet with your group or class do the following:

- Put a list of 3-5 adjectives on the board that describe how you see yourself. Remind the group you are looking for personality traits (e.g., friendly) not physical characteristics (e.g., good looks).
- Create a second list containing 3-4 people you admire. They can be public figures or people you know first hand.
- Next to that list put 3-4 adjectives that describe one of the people on your list.

Your board might look something like this:



<u>The way I am:</u>	<u>A person or character I admire:</u>	<u>The way Helen Keller is:</u>
Hot tempered	Jane Eyre	Smart
Optimistic	Oprah Winfrey	Giving
Responsible	Helen Keller	Determined to succeed
Withdrawn/shy	My mother	Optimistic
	Jay-Z	



Gamal Jones

Ask the group to make their own lists. Ask for volunteers to share their lists.

Writing the essay for Contest #1

Ask the students to look at their lists. Then ask them to think of a tough situation or challenge that ended in a disappointing way for them (argument with a parent, negative peer pressure, doing badly on a test or project, bad job experience, a first date). Would being more like one of their admired people have helped them handle it better? What qualities would have helped them get a happier result?

Pre-writing Activity for Contest #1:
Fill in the blanks—Have students respond to the closure prompts on the next page.

Use two nouns: "Sometimes I wish I can stop acting like a _____ and be a _____ instead."

Use two verbs: "I remember the day I should have _____ instead of _____."

Use two adjectives: "My friends think I am usually _____ but they don't know how _____ I want to be."

Use one name and one adjective: "I would like to be more like _____ because he/she is so _____."

Tell your group to use one of these as an opening sentence to the essay.

Writing Contest #2— Letter to Parents

"Write a letter to your parents telling them what's going on in your life that they should know about—but don't."
Deadline for entries: May 7, 2007

INTRO: This annual contest topic generates more enthusiasm (and essays) than any other. Your students will enjoy writing these letters—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, challenges they face, hopes for the future, etc.

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, cutting a class, unspoken love for the parent or a sibling. On a humorous note, we once published a letter from a son confessing that he was a Martian. (NOTE: Some of the young people in your class or group may not be living with their biological parents. Remind everyone that they can write a letter to a guardian, or to an absent parent, or even a parent who has died.)

Remind your students that because many of the letters reveal very private information the essays will be published anonymously, and we might change details to conceal the writer's identity. The



Matty DeLuna

winners' names will be chosen at random to preserve anonymity.

Pre-writing activity for Contest #2

Help your students get started on this contest by writing some of the opening lines from previous letters on the board:

- 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 but that's not true.

Reading activity for Contest #2

Reading a story before they start writing can sometimes give your students ideas about what to write. Have them read "Can't Afford to Follow" on page 4. Charlene George describes how she starts cutting school and almost gets nabbed by the police when her cutting crew causes trouble at the mall. She tells her mother about it, gets punished, and then makes friends with a more positive group of classmates. Tell your students that this is the kind of behavior that many essay writers in the past have focused on.

Peer Pressure Activities

Our teen staff wrote some great stories about negative and positive peer pressure for the March 2007 issue.

Activity #1 "Peer Pressure Speak Out," p. 24

Goal: Students compare opinions and experiences of peer pressure.

Activity: Before passing out the magazine, read the Speak Out questions aloud to them. Have your students write 2-3 sentences in response to the questions.

Then pass out the magazines and have your students read the responses on this page. Ask your students to comment on the differences and similarities among their comments and those of the teens quoted on page 24.

Activity #2 "Can't Afford to Follow," p. 4

Goal: Students write about resisting peer pressure.

Students read about peer pressure and write a short essay about a time they succumbed to peer pressure and how they later stopped.

Read the story in class (silently, or aloud with you and the students taking turns).

1. Ask some simple factual questions:
Why didn't Charlene get pulled in by the police?
Why did she refuse to steal money from her mother and what did she do instead?

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Why did she tell her mother about her cutting?

How was the second group of friends different from the first?

2. Give your students the following assignment (they can do it at home if that seems more practical.) They are to write a three-paragraph personal essay. In the first paragraph, they should describe something negative that they (or a friend) did because other people were doing it. The second paragraph should describe why they stopped. The third paragraph should relate how they felt after they stopped.

3. Ask for volunteers to read the stories out loud in the group. Focus on why the writer stopped the negative activity. Why did she stop? Was it hard? What did she gain from stopping? What did she lose?

Activity #3

“Teens Give In to Fit In,” p. 5

Goal: Link teens' values to resisting negative peer pressure.

Khalia Alicea describes how she started hanging out with a cutting crew and then abandoned them in favor of pursuing her own goals.

Read the story out loud. Point out two important paragraphs. The second paragraph has Khalia's reasons for not cutting school anymore. The next to last paragraph of the story quotes a psychia-

trist about the importance of values in resisting negative peer pressure. Ask the group what value Khalia upheld when she quit cutting.

Ask the students to name some of their values (e.g. courage, honesty, loyalty, being true to oneself). Write the values on the board. Ask them if there has ever been a time when they resisted peer pressure in order to uphold a value (for example, they

didn't shoplift because honesty is a value). Ask them if there has been a time when two of their values were in conflict (such as not shoplifting because of honesty, but feeling pressure to shoplift because of loyalty to the group). How did they resolve the conflict?

Activity #4

“Keeping Me in Line,” p. 6

Goal: Identify sources of positive pressure.

Daniela Castillo transfers to a demanding high school because she knows she will slack off in a less strict environment.

This story presents a good example of (mostly) positive peer pressure. Ask your group what groups or institutions (family, church, workplace, school, sports team, after school program) have helped them achieve their goals by enabling them to hang out with motivated and goal oriented teens.

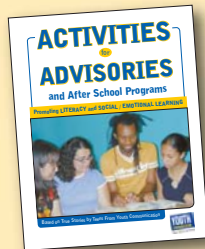


Byron Pabon

Resources from Youth Communication

NEW: Lessons for Advisories!

Activities for Advisories includes 24 stories and lessons in a three-ring binder for easy copying. They include role plays, mock trials, debates, Bingo games, freewriting, creating timelines, and more. These active and engaging lessons encourage students to think about trust, betrayal, anger management, and being true to oneself. Themes include friendship, relations with family, careers, AIDS/HIV and others. The 160-page manual is only \$24.95. and comes with copying privileges for classroom use. Go to the Youth Communication Web store at www.youthcomm.org to order cop-



ies, or send \$24.95 plus \$5 for shipping and handling to Youth Communication, 224 W. 29th St., 2nd fl., NYC 10001.

Send us your email and get advance notice of writing contests and more

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CONTEST \$150 PRIZE

Rename New Youth Connections!
DEADLINE: May 4, 2007

New Youth Connections is changing its name and asking its readers to help.

See the ad on page 5 for details.

After School Activity

Learning What Others Think About Relationships

This activity works for groups ages 14 and up.

Purposes of the activity:

- 1) Help teens to become more aware of the each other's perspectives on dating and relationships.
- 2) Encourage teens to become more aware of gender stereotypes

What you'll need for the activity:

- copies of the story "Not Just About Sex," p. 3
- two large envelopes
- pencils or pens
- note paper

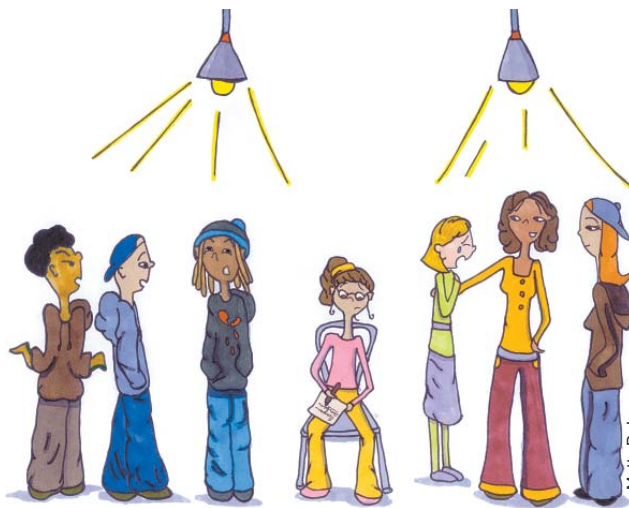
Preview of activity

Have the group will read the story "Not Just About Sex" (or part of the story, see note below). The group will then write questions about dating and relationships that they would like to ask someone.

Step 1, Introduction: Tell the group they will get a chance to eavesdrop on their peers as they talk about relationships and dating. First the entire group will read a story about how one girl found out about what boys really want in relationships and how her girlfriends failed to find happiness in their relationships with boys.

Step 2, Read the story: The point of reading the story is to introduce the idea that teens can benefit from talking with each other. The story has two main parts. The first is mostly about how the author profited from talking with her male friends about relationships and is more germane to this exercise. You can have your group read the story up until the sub-head "Talking about Sex" if the story is too long to read in class. You can read it aloud yourself, ask for volunteers to read sections, or have the group read it silently.

Step 3, The questions: Divide the group into two sections with each section having an equal or close to equal number of girls and boys. Then divide the sections into pairs (the gender of the pairs doesn't matter). Tell the pairs they have five minutes to talk about questions they'd like to ask other teens and then write at least two questions on notebook paper, which they should fold over and give to you. There should be only one question on each



piece of paper.

NOTE: Have some sample questions ready to prompt them with, either orally or written on the board. Here are some suggestions:

"What most attracts you to another person?"

"What would you like to do on a date?"

"What is a sure-fire relationship killer?"

"What's your favorite romantic/dating movie and why?"

Step 4, The discussion: Ask one group (Group A) to sit in a circle. Ask the other group (Group B) to stand in a circle around the outside of the chairs. While they're doing that, collect the questions and quickly screen them for inappropriate questions. Put the questions in an envelope. Place group B's questions in the middle of Group A and ask a Group A member

to take a question and read it out loud. She or he then moderates a discussion of the question. Group B has to stay quiet until Group A has finished discussing the question. Then, if Group B members have follow up questions, they can raise their hands to be recognized by the discussion leader (the Group A member who originally picked out the question). When the envelope is empty, switch roles. (Group B will sit in the inner circle and Group A will stand behind them.)

NOTE: Take notes as the discussions go on and be alert to comments that stereotype either genders like "Girls are too emotional" or "Guys are insensitive." You will surely hear comments like those and the notes will help you lead the summing up phase.

Step 5, Summing up: After Group B finishes ask the students to write down one or two things what stood out for them in the discussion. Discuss. Were they surprised about anything? Did they learn anything new? If they were planning to write a book, "How to Build a Healthy Relationship," what information did they learn today that they would want to include in the book? Did they notice any stereotypes? Did they disagree with anything they heard?

[This activity was adapted from Group Exercises for Adolescents: A Manual for Therapists, Second Edition, by Susan Carrell.]

Summer Writing Workshops—Coming Soon

Next month we'll send all *New Youth Connections* teacher/distributors information on our 28th 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 experi-

enced, full-time instructional staff. All instruction is based on writing stories for the fall 2007 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 by April 1.