



Tips for Teachers

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

March 2008

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Writing Contests—Cash Prizes

Reminder: Your students can enter the contest by going to our website and clicking on the “enter contest” button. Our web address is youthcomm.org

Writing contest #187

What makes you feel good about yourself? How and why? This can be a person, place, activity or something about yourself.

**p. 2, Deadline:
March 24, 2008**

Two Writing Lesson Ideas Related to Contest #187

This contest is a great opportunity to learn something

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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youthcomm.org

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

good about your students—and to help them practice one or more pre-writing activities. Here are some suggestions.

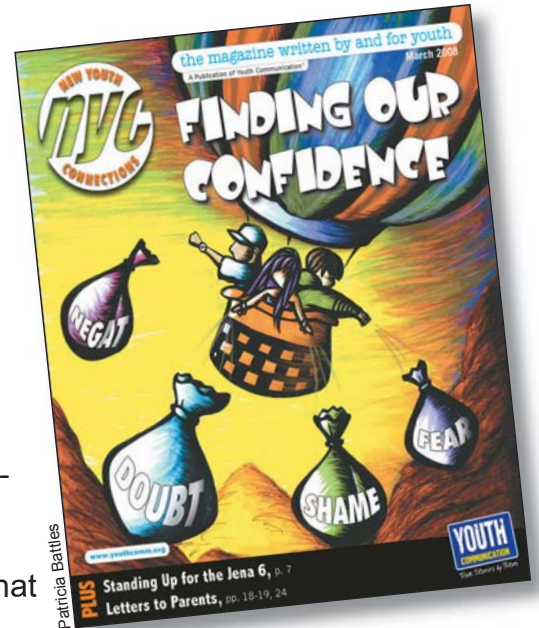
Writing Lesson 1: Reading Stories in This Issue

Tell your group that reading a story before writing an essay can give you ideas about getting started and what to write about.

We published three short articles about feeling good about yourself on pages 12 and 13. Ask your group to read them (a competent reader can read each aloud in about 5-7 minutes if you want to ask for volunteers to do that).

Here are some discussion questions to pose after the reading.

- What actions made the authors feel good about themselves? Did they ever feel bad about themselves in the stories? Did they ever lack confidence?
- What people helped them do the things that made them feel good?
- Are any of these activi-



ties—dressing nicely, playing sports, doing well in school or other program—important to them? What are some activities that they value?

Give them a few minutes to write down an opening sentence to their essay. Ask for volunteers to read theirs aloud.

For homework, ask them to write a contest submission. Encourage them to read the essays again before they start writing.

Writing Lesson 2: Telling and Showing

Briefly explain to students that they can “tell” what makes them feel good, or they can

“show” what makes them feel good. Good writing includes both telling and showing. To illustrate the point have them read the very short contest essay on page 21 entitled “Adventures with Grandma.” Notice how the writer shows the reader what happened by

putting concrete details (especially nouns) into her essay: the couch, the toys, the lunch, how the journal looked, how they made their journal entries. The writer also tells the reader why this memory is important and how she valued those times with her grandmother.

Get More Teaching Resources at the Youth Communication Website
(www.youthcomm.org)

- You can order dozens of books and teacher guides on topics your students are interested in.



- You can download over 250 stories from past issues of *New Youth Connections* and *Represent: The Voice of Youth in Foster Care*.

- You can download lesson ideas from past issues of “Tips for Teachers.”

- You can find out about writing workshops for young people in foster care.

- You can browse our book and DVD catalog and order from our e-store.

- You can have your students enter our writing contests.

Ask them to choose an activity that makes them happy. Ask them to make three columns on a piece of paper. In one column, they will list as many nouns as they can that are related to the activity (the more nouns the better). Another column will have verbs and the last will have adjectives. (Depending on your situation you can do this exercise along with them or do one beforehand to show them.)

As they write their essay they should use as many words from their lists as they can as well as new ones that occur to them. Once they are done “showing” the activity with their word lists they should write two “telling” sentences about why this activity means so much to them.

Warning: Sex and Drugs (watch out for wiseguys): Some teens may decide to write about things like having sex, smoking pot, or other activities that might not be suitable for school. Tell them if they want to write an essay on their own, outside of school, on a topic like that they are free to do so and submit it on their own. But for a class essay they have to stay within the bounds that are appropriate for school.

Writing Contest #188

What’s the strangest thing you’ve ever done? Why did you do it and what did you get out of the experience?

p. 2, Deadline: May 5, 2008

(See lesson below)

Writing Lesson Related to Writing Contest #188: Interview and Reflect Back

Before the lesson write down the following questions on the board:

Description:

What time of day and year did it happen? Day, night, winter, summer?

What locations were involved? School, street, your home?

Who was with you when it happened? Friends, enemies, relatives, teachers? Did anyone get mad at you or congratulate you?

What motivated you to do it? What did you want to feel as a result of doing it?

What did you or other people say while it happened?

What physical objects were involved in the event?

How did you feel while it was happening? What about after?

First, ask your group to write down one or two unusual things that their friends or relatives have done. (Sometimes it’s easier to start thinking about a personal topic if you first think about other people being in the

situation.) If you feel your group needs some prompting you can put some categories on the board: personal appearance, clothes, parties, trips, shopping expeditions, hanging out on a Saturday, friends, school adventures. You can also volunteer something of your own.

Then ask them to complete this sentence: "The strangest thing I have ever done was the time I _____"

Tell them to pretend they are being interviewed by Oprah about this experience and she is asking them the questions on the board. They should spend 1-2 minutes writing down responses to the questions. When the "interview" is over, give each person 15 minutes to write a short contest entry about his or her experience.

Lesson: Helping Teens Think About Independence and Family Ties

Story: "My Life As a Long Hair," by Angel Muñoz, p. 8

Goal: This activity will help students think about how they might respond when two important values collide: independence and approval of family.

1. Introduce story. Tell your students that they are going to read a story about a teenager

who does something that might anger his family.

2. Read the story. As you read (aloud or silently) tell students to mark the places in the story where the author mentions how family members reacted to his long hair.



3. Discuss. Here are some discussion questions.

—What is the story about? Is it about long hair, rebellion, family relations, self-confidence, testing boundaries, forming your own identity?

—How did members of his family react to his hair? Were you surprised by these reactions?

—What did you think of how he handled his father's animosity? (Note: Remember, at first Angel used humor to deflect his father's complaints. Then he started ignoring him.)

—How else could Angel have responded besides ignoring his father? (For example, he could have tried to tell his father about the benefits of his hair or he could have angrily told him to get off his back.)

—What adjectives describe Angel?

4. Activity. Distribute blank paper to each student. Ask them to write down one thing they have considered doing—or might consider doing in the future—that would anger members of their family. Remind them the action might anger some family members but not others, as in Angel's case. Instruct them NOT to put their name on their sheet.

Then ask them to write down one benefit of taking the action (such as feeling good about themselves or being admired by their friends) and one negative consequence (such as anger from parents) that the action might cause.

Ask the students to fold their paper. Collect them and put them into a box. Pick out some of the responses and read a few. Ask for reactions. Do the benefits outweigh the costs? Would members of the group advise any of the writers not to take the action?

Note: The purpose of this method is to protect teens' anonymity. Make sure to discourage students from "guessing" who wrote a particular response.

Lesson: Helping Teens Think About Getting Help

Story: "Breathing Easier," by Viveca Shearin, p. 10

Goal: This activity will help students think about steps that they can take to get help when they are challenged with a serious problem.

1. Introduce story. Tell your group that they are going to read a story about a teenager who struggles with a problem on her own and chooses not to seek help from her family or anyone else.

2. Read the story. As you read (aloud or silently) tell students to mark the places in the story where the author mentions her reluctance to let her family members know how she was feeling about her asthma.

3. Discuss "inside the story." Here are some discussion questions.

—Do they admire Viveca? Why? (Note: She shows courage, independence and self-awareness.)

—What finally motivated Viveca to venture outside again and lead a more normal pre-teen life? (Note: See the paragraph in the fourth column under the sub-head "Taking My Life Back.")

—Why did they think Viveca

refused to open up to her family about her anxieties and fears? Tell them to look at the places they marked during the reading and provide some quotes from Viveca about this question.

—What would have been the worst thing to happen to Viveca if she told her parents the real reasons for staying inside? What do you think her parents would have done if she told them the truth? Should her parents have been more aware

4. Discuss "outside the story."

—Has there been a time when you were reluctant to get help?

—Have you ever asked somebody for help?

—Has asking for help ever made things worse?

5. Activity. Remind the group that Viveca is a real live person (look at her photo) who would love to hear what they



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of her problem and talked to her about it?

—If you were Viveca's friend and knew about her asthma fears, what would you have done to help? Would you have talked to anyone about the situation? Who?

—Were there other adults Viveca might have talked with about her asthma like a teacher, school nurse, or family friend?

—What adjectives describe Viveca?

think about her story. Assign them to write letters to her telling her what they admire most about her while also including some advice to her about handling a similar problem in the future. Tell them you are going to send them to the magazine. Viveca will read them and some of them may be printed in the next issue. Send them to Youth Communication · 224 West 29th St., Second Floor · NY, NY 10001.