

## **Tips for Teachers to accompany the March, 2009 issue of *New Youth Connections***

*Note to teachers:* To cut costs, Tips for Teachers will now be available only online. We will e-mail you this version, which accompanies the print edition of *NYC*. In addition, we will attach the lessons to any stories we post online at [www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org).

If you know colleagues who would like to get the Tips, please send us their e-mail.

### **In This Issue—Lessons for:**

Writing Contest #194: Do the right thing (deadline: 3/30/09)

Writing Contest #195: Send a letter to the President (deadline 5/11/09)

Story: University of Kitchen

Lesson one: Do the right thing? (writing/discussion)

Lesson two: Horns of a dilemma (critical thinking/writing)

Lesson three: Uses of Metaphor & Simile

Story: Penguin in the Sahara

Lesson: Peer Pressure (guided reading/discussion)

Story: Finding My Haitian Pride

Lesson: Peer Pressure (guided reading/discussion)

Story: Magic at My Fingertips

Lesson: Three-part essay (guided reading/writing)

## **Writing Contest #194—Win \$150**

Deadline: March 30, 2009

**What does it mean to do the right thing?** Pick *one* of the following words and describe a time you, or someone you know, acted on it, and how things turned out:

Loyalty \* Courage \* Compassion \* Honesty \* Fairness \* Generosity \* Faith \*

Forgiveness

### **1. Win this Contest! (appeal to the judges)**

Remind your students that *fellow teens* read and judge all the entries. Their essays need to appeal to people just like them (not to teachers, for example).

**2. Brainstorming:** On the board, write the contest question and the eight words. As a group, briefly review each of the words and what they mean to the students. For example, loyalty could mean sticking up for a long-time friend who is ostracized from the group. Or it could mean not snitching on someone who committed a crime. Or courage could mean withstanding peer pressure to have sex, or it could mean going against your parents' rules and having sex, or it could mean telling your partner to wear a condom.

**Let students define the meaning of the terms for themselves; don't judge their definitions or examples. We're running this contest to try to get a sense of how *teens* define these terms in action.**

**3. Pre-writing:** Ask each student to pick a word that calls to mind an event from his or her life or that of a friend or relative and write the word at the top of the page.

Then students should make notes to themselves about the event. Here are a couple suggestions for getting started.

*The five Ws and the H:* Have students write these words down the left side of the page:

Who  
What  
Where  
When  
Why  
How

For each word, they should write everything they can think of about the event, such as all the people involved (who), where it happened, etc.

*Senses:* They can make a separate list using the five senses:

Smell  
Sight  
Taste  
Touch  
Hearing

For each sense they should write something about the event, e.g., “I could smell the cigarette smoke in the room....”

*Highlight the conflict:* Most of the things we do each day are not “right” or “wrong.” Going to McDonalds is not “doing the right thing” compared to going to Burger King. When we “do the right thing” it is usually implied, at least, that there was another course of action we could have taken that would *not* have been the right thing.

Ask students to write down the *right thing* the person did, and the *wrong thing* they might have done. Then, ask them to write some of the possible *benefits* of doing the wrong thing. For example, if the “wrong thing” would have been just have sex without the condom, the benefits might be that you wouldn’t have to confront your boyfriend (and risk losing him). You wouldn’t have to have a discussion about sex; you could just do it. You wouldn’t have to argue about whether you loved him, or he was “clean.”

Tell students that showing how someone was tempted to do the wrong thing, or how doing the wrong thing would have been easier, or more lucrative, for example, will make the fact that they did the right thing seem more impressive.

**4. Write the essay.** Tell the students that with their 5Ws and the H, the sensory descriptions, and the conflict, they have all the ingredients of a good essay.

Many students can now just begin writing. For students who need more help, you can suggest an outline:

*Beginning:* Name the word and what it means to you.

*Middle:* First, describe the scene in which they or their friend act on the word (e.g., at a table in the cafeteria; in a bedroom). Then describe the conflict. Imagine what the person was thinking; what temptations there were to do the wrong thing. Finally, describe how the person did the right thing.

*End:* Describe how you felt about doing the right thing. Did it make you feel proud? Relieved? Any regrets? Would you do it again?

## **Writing Contest #195—Win \$150!**

Deadline: May 11, 2009

**Write a letter telling President Obama how the recession has affected you, a friend, or a family member, or about what worries you most about the economy. How do you think he could help families like yours?**

Ask your group what they understand about the economic crisis. Do they know anyone who has lost a job, taken a pay cut, had to move, leave school, cut back on necessities like food or medicine, or put off buying something? Do they know anyone who has had troubles with a mortgage or lost a home? Have they heard their parents or other adults discussing issues like these? (You can list these items on the board before you address the group.) Let the discussion go for about five minutes.

Then ask them if they have any concerns about the next two years of their life. Are they planning on starting college, going to a trade school, joining the armed forces, getting a job out of high school, etc?

Lead another 5-minute discussion.

Ask them to name things they think President Obama can do about helping people keep or find jobs. Write three or four reasonable responses on the board and add one or two of your own. Then ask them to write letters to the president, using these ideas or others in their letters. Require them to include at least one example of how something they think the president can do will help them, their family or someone they know.

## **Story: University of Kitchen, by Orubba Almansouri, p. 3**

Here are three lessons you can use with this story.

Note: This is a long story but is written in a simple, conversational style that makes it easy reading. Depending on your group's reading levels, you might consider asking them

to take the story home to read and do the activities the next day. If you do that, change the directions below.

### **Lesson #1: Doing the Right Thing: Read, discuss, and write about it**

#### Before the session

Read the story yourself and list the traits she exhibits in the margins. As you read, circle where in the story she shows these characteristics and write an adjective next to the passage. Some of the traits she exhibits include bravery, persistence, loyalty, thoughtfulness, and optimism. On the negative side, you may list subservience, and passivity.

#### Reading the story

Tell your group they are going to read a story by a Yemeni high school girl who wants to go to college even though her father might not let her. The outcome is undecided since she is still in high school and has not asked her father directly about his wishes. As they read the story they will circle where she does or says something that indicates what kind of person she is and write an adjective in the margin at that place in the story. Give them an example from your reading of the story.

#### Discussion

After the reading, ask the group if they think Orubba is doing the right thing for her family and for herself. Ask them to look at their marked up story so they can cite where in the story she is succeeding or failing to do the right thing. As part of the discussion ask them what they think Orubba could do to increase her chances of going to college. If you have time you can outline their suggestions on the board and have them vote on the best option for Orubba. (One option that may not be apparent to them is for Orubba to ask a teacher or other adult who sympathizes with her desire to attend college and who would be credible to her father to talk with him. Be sure to bring up that strategy if they don't.)

#### Writing exercises

Based on their reading and the discussion, encourage students to write a letter to Orubba telling her what they think she should do and, more importantly, how she should go about doing it.

Or a simpler writing exercise is to have them write letters to the editor commenting on Orubba's dilemma and giving their advice. You can collect them and send them to us for possible publication in the next issue.

### **Lesson #2: The Horns of a Dilemma: Lesson in Critical Thinking**

Orubba describes a very difficult dilemma: It seems that she may either have to forego college, or disobey her father's wishes. In this lesson, students will explore the writer's dilemma, and (we hope) some of their own.

*Goal:* Reduce “either/or” thinking; increase students’ complex, higher order thinking skills, including the capacity to hold two conflicting ideas in mind at once.

*Methods:* reading, note taking, guided discussion.

Write “Caught in the Horns of a Dilemma” on the board. Ask students if they know what it means, or ask them to volunteer guesses. Depending on how much they volunteer, you can clarify: The expression means that you have two bad choices, or that the benefits of making one choice are canceled out by the effect of not making the other choice. (You may want to tell them that the phrase may come from the idea of choosing which one of a bull’s horns to grab if it is charging at you: no matter which you grab, the other one may still gore you.)

*1. Pre-Reading Discussion: Students will show they understand the phrase, identifying times when they’ve been caught on the horns of a dilemma.*

Ask students to give examples of the “horns of a dilemma” they could imagine or have experienced. Here are a few examples to prompt them if needed:

--A teen is asked out by a boy that she really likes and wants to accept, but she knows that he’s going out with her best friend.

--A girl is pregnant and opposes abortion, but if she tells her parents she’ll be kicked out of the house.

--A boy wants to help his mother with the rent because she’s on the brink of eviction, but the only quick way to get the money is to sell drugs.

Press your students a bit to come up with their own dilemmas. For the above dilemmas, and the ones they come up with, ask them to identify problem associated with each choice and how the two choices are in conflict.

*2. Read the story and analyze the dilemma that Orubba faces.*

Introduce the story by explaining to the students that this writer faces a conflict between two values: loyalty to her father, and loyalty to her own goals for her life.

Ask students to write two headings, side by side at the top of a sheet of paper, titled: “Loyalty to father” and “Loyalty to personal goals.”

Tell them that you’re going to have them read a story out loud, and each time they see an example of loyalty to father” the students should write “father” in the margin. Each time they see an example of loyalty to self they could write “self” next to it. When you’re done reading, they will copy the “father” and “self” sections into the columns on their sheet of paper. Tell them they have to find at least three examples for each column.

When students have finished copying items into their columns, ask them to read aloud some items from each column. Use your comments to clarify the dilemma: The writer has tremendous loyalty to her father, but she also wants to honor her own desire to go to college.

Now ask students: “What’s the dilemma?” It should be obvious to them that there is (or may be) a conflict between pleasing her father and pleasing herself.

Finally, ask the students how the writer should resolve the problem. What would be the advantage of giving up her dream of college? What would be the advantage of acting on it? What would be the advantage of fulfilling her role as a loyal daughter? What would be the disadvantage? *The important point is not for you or the students to take one position or another, but for the students to wrestle with the complexity and ambiguity and come up with good reasons for their opinions.* Whether they agree or disagree with the writer is not the point: that’s what the *writer* believes. You’re trying to guide them in how to think about an issue—divided loyalty—for which there may be no easy or right answer.

### **Lesson #3: Uses of Metaphor and Simile**

Read the story: Orubba uses metaphorical expressions to describe her life throughout the story. (Orubba compares parts of her life to climbing a ladder, running a race, ordering from a menu, and eating a meal. Her nieces and nephews are sweet as honey.)

Depending on your group’s reading level, you can ask them to scan the story and call out when they find one. (You can divide them into groups to do this.) Write abbreviated responses on the board. Or you can read the story yourself, mark the metaphors, and tell them where to go in the story to find them. Read the paragraphs out loud so they understand what is being compared to what.

Writing activity: Ask your group to compare their school careers to a sporting event, a TV show or movie, taking a car ride, ordering at a restaurant or other activity. Write a brief passage showing how the comparison works. (“I feel like a contestant on American Idol trying to please my judges...I mean teachers.”)

## **Story: Penguin in the Sahara, by Sayda Morales, p. 8**

### **Peer Pressure**

**Activity:** Guided Reading & Discussion

**Goal:** Students will recognize that peer pressure stems from insecurity. They will see specific steps that the author took to feel more secure in who she was, and how that made her a stronger, more independent person.

You will read this story in segments with students. You’ll ask questions and facilitate discussion at each stage. Before you begin, number the paragraphs to help you follow this lesson. (Students don’t need to number their paragraphs unless you want them to. You can just tell them to read the “next” paragraph.)

Read paragraphs 1 and 2: Ask the students: “Do you think Sayda is going to be susceptible to peer pressure in this new school? Why?” [They should pick up on the fact that she’s going to feel insecure and want to fit in.]

Read paragraph 3: Ask the students: “What challenge is Sayda going to face?” [She tells them...it’s understanding who she is as a Latina.] Ask the students to speculate about what that will involve.

Read paragraphs 4-12: Ask the students: “What does Sayda do that shows her insecurity?” [She dances hip hop for them, when she has no idea what she’s doing.] How does she feel about it? Why? [She feels ashamed that she’s letting them define who she is instead of asserting herself.]

Read paragraphs 13-22: Ask the students: “How does Sayda become more secure and confident in who she is?” [She does a lot of things, including examining the food she eats, the music she listens to. She joins two groups that promote “minority” culture. She works to educate classmates.]

What impact does that have? How does she feel about herself? Do you think she would have felt better if she had just tried to fit in? Does everyone like the fact that she’s more outspoken and assertive about being her own person? [No. Some people think she has an “attitude.”]

Closing question: Ask each person in the room to characterize Sayda in one or two words. (They can’t repeat words.).

Where in the story do students first realize that Sayda is going to face pressure? [In the first two paragraphs she describes going to a new school, and a new school with kids who are very different from her.]

Ask students how that will affect the pressure she feels. [Help them to express the connection between feeling insecure and caving into peer pressure.]

Optional writing activity

Have students think of a time when they caved in to peer pressure. Did they continue to cave in, or did they find a way to strengthen their confidence and resist the pressure? How do they feel about the situation now?

## **Story: Finding My Haitian Pride, by Marsha Dupiton, p. 9**

### **Peer Pressure Lesson**

**Goal:** Students will recognize that peer pressure stems from insecurity. They will see specific steps that the author took to feel more secure in who she was, and how that made her a stronger, more independent person.

You will read this story in segments with students. You’ll ask questions and facilitate discussion at each stage. Before you begin, number the paragraphs to help you follow this lesson. (Students don’t need to number their paragraphs unless you want them to. You can just tell them to read the “next” paragraph.)

Read paragraphs 1-7: Ask the students, “Do you think Marsha is going to stand up for herself, or cave in to the pressure to pretend to be ‘less Haitian’ or stand up for herself and her culture?” Get them to debate the merits of standing up versus the pressure of fitting in during the junior high school years.

Ask them what they think she means when she says, “I wasn’t going to become prey?” (Is she going to fight back? Cave in? Why?)

Read paragraph 8: Ask the students, “How does Marsha feel about being Haitian?” Discussion.

Read paragraphs 9-10: Ask the students, “How does her feeling about being Haitian change? Why?”

Read paragraphs 11-16: Ask the students to list all of the things Marsha does to change. Do the changes help her fit in? How does she feel about that? [Note: She has mixed feelings. She’s glad she fits in, but she feels ashamed about what she’s doing.]

Read paragraphs 17-20: What does Marsha learn in this section? [That she’s not the only one who has struggled with this issue; even a famous poet has.]

She vows to change. Ask students to speculate about what she’ll do and whether she’ll succeed.

Read paragraphs 21-30: How does Marsha resolve her situation? Do they think it was easy? Do you think she will be able to “balance her heritage with her American upbringing,” as she says in the last paragraph? What will be hard about that?

Optional writing activity

Have students think of a time when they caved in to peer pressure. Did they continue to cave in, or did they find a way to strengthen their confidence and resist the pressure? How do they feel about the situation now?

## **Story:** Letters to Parents, pp. 17-19

**Activity:** Letter writing

**Goal:** Help students improve letter writing and empathic reading

These letters are always exceptionally moving to readers. They’re also short and easy to read. Ask your students to read as many letters as you want to assign (there are 11 altogether).

Then, tell them they should pick one letter that stands out for them and write a letter back to the author. They must tell the author why his or her letter stood out. For example, they

may have faced a similar struggle; they may admire how the author coped with a difficult situation; they may have advice for the author.

## **Story:** Magic at My Fingertips, by Cassandra Lim

**Activity:** Careful reading; essay writing

**Goal:** Students will write an essay about something they are good at or passionate about.

Have students read Cassandra's story. Tell them that the story can be roughly divided into three parts:

- 1) A beginning, in which Cassandra introduces us to her interest in nail
- 2) A middle, in which Cassandra writes about nail care and design
- 3) An end in which Cassandra writes about what her nails mean to her.

Ask the students to read the story and draw a line between the beginning, middle, and end of the story. [The beginning ends after paragraph 7; the middle ends after paragraph 10—though let student make the case for why they think the dividers should be somewhat different. What you want them to do is get a better understanding of beginning/middle/end structure for stories.

Now, ask students to think about things they do well, or are passionate about. It could include anything: singing, dancing, listening to music, movies, education, sports, etc. Each person must come up with something that they like a lot.

Then ask them to divide a piece of paper into three sections, and to label the sections like this:

Beginning: Introduce the subject and how I got interested in it.

Middle: Describe how I show my interest (what I do).

End: What this activity means to me now.

Give students 15 minutes to list items in each section. (If students get done quickly, ask them to start writing full sentences about each item.)

If possible, collect these outlines from students, read them, and add comments and questions. In most cases, you will be confused or want to know more (ask students to add information and clarify). They will also have information in the wrong categories. Within reason, show them where things should go.

Ask students to write their essays. When they hand them in they should put a line between the beginning, middle, and end of their essays. This will help students begin to understand the use of the time-tested beginning-middle-end structure for essay writing.