



Tips for Teachers

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

May/June 2001

Was It Child Abuse?

Naomi Hopkins, in "Was It a Case of Child Abuse?," p. 3, describes a disturbing incident in which she witnesses a mother severely beating a child in the supermarket where she works. Neither Naomi nor her co-workers intervene, and she wonders if she made a mistake by not doing so.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Would it have been a good idea for Naomi to have said something to the mother in the store on the day the incident happened? Why or why not?

—If you were in Naomi's shoes, how would you have handled the situation?

—Have you ever been in a situation similar to Naomi's? What did you do at the time? If you could go back, would you do the same thing? Why or why not?

A Quick Way to Get Everyone Writing:

Letters to the Editor: Remind readers that we welcome letters to the editor and publish most of them (see p. 20). They may evolve out of some of the lessons below and can be quite brief. We welcome letters to the editor and publish most of them (see p. 20). This is an easy way to involve everyone in a short writing assignment (and they will get the satisfaction of seeing their names in print). Writing letters can be an ideal "Do Now" exercise after your students finish reading NYC. Use these prompts to get your students started (a few sentences on one or more of these points will be sufficient):

"I liked/disliked the article because...,"

"A point I really agree with in the article, based on my experience, is...,"

"A point I really disagree with, based on my experience, is..."

"A solution to one of the problems in this article might be..."

—Naomi's co-workers felt it was "none of their business" to say or do anything. What is your reaction to that?

Roleplay:

—Two students, playing Naomi and one of her co-workers. They are talking about the incident after the mother has left the store. The co-worker feels what happened is none of Naomi's business and that getting involved "will only open a can of worms" and might hurt the children more. Naomi feels it is her business and she wants to report the incident to the hotline.

This White Boy Has Soul

In "Rocked: How 'Bout Some Classic Soul?," p. 5, Jonathan Maseng talks about his love for Barry White, Stevie Wonder, and the artist formerly known as Prince. Jonathan, who is White, sometimes gets odd looks from his friends for liking "Black music," but to Jonathan all that matters is that the music speaks to him.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

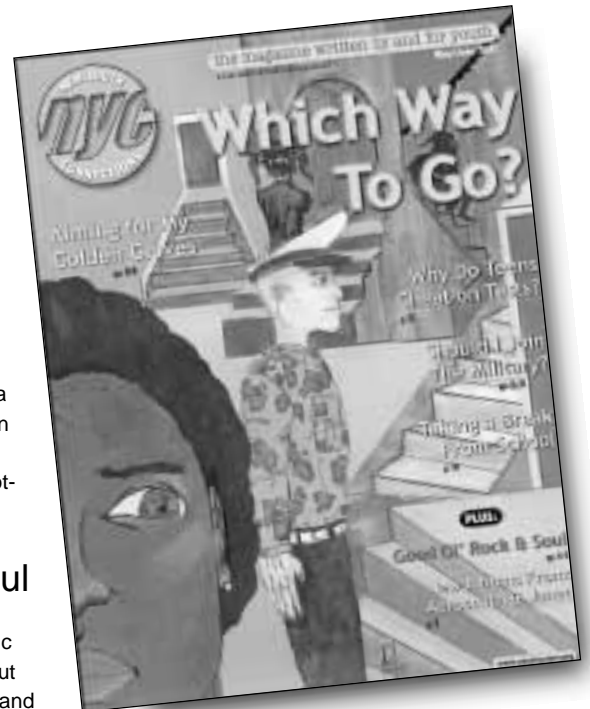
—Do your musical tastes sometimes conflict with those of your friends or peers? How so? Have you ever been tempted to change or hide your tastes in music to conform to what others like? Why or why not?

—Some teens categorize music as "Black music" or "White music," or label it in other ways. Is there such a thing as "Black music" or "White music"? Can you judge a person by the music they listen to? Why or why not?

—Write a letter to your favorite recording artist, describing why you relate to his/her music and how it has influenced or helped you.

Roleplay:

—Two students, playing Jonathan and a friend. The friend thinks Jonathan's love of Prince, Stevie Wonder, and Barry White is corny. Jonathan defends his love of these



A note on the lessons:

The following lessons are designed to promote reflection on the issues raised by the stories in NYC. Each story is summarized briefly, followed by prompts that can be used to initiate discussion and/or brief writing assignments. In addition, roleplays are suggested for more active learning.

A note on the role plays:

You will need two or three teens to act out the suggested role plays in front of class. Make sure the young people understand their roles by briefly reviewing the characters in the stories. Each role play participant has to try to convince the other of her point of view. Let the role play go on for about five minutes. Then have the class discuss what they've seen and relate it back to the themes in the story.

A note on the group exercises:

These activities are designed to have students work together in pairs or small groups. They can then share their work with the larger group.

artists by explaining what he gets from listening to them.

Problems with the “N-Word”

In “The N-Word—Not in My Vocabulary,” p. 7, TaNesha Gee describes how offended she is when she hears teens use the word n-gger in addressing one another. She interviews teens and adults to find out their reactions to this issue, and reviews the history of slavery and racism in this country that she feels should make the use of the word forbidden.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—TaNesha believes the “n-word,” no matter how it’s used or who uses it, is wrong. What is your reaction to this?

—Why do you think teens use this word in addressing one another? What do you think they are trying to say by using the word?

—Some Black teens freely use the word “n-gger” in addressing one another, yet would never tolerate a White person using it. What is your reaction to this? Why do some teens think it’s okay for some people to use the word, and not others?

—Write a short letter to TaNesha, telling her whether you agree or disagree with her point of view on this issue.

Roleplay:

—Two students, playing TaNesha and a friend. The friend thinks that the word “n-gger” is just a word and there’s nothing wrong with using it in certain situations. TaNesha thinks it’s a terrible word to use in any situation.

He May Well Be a Contender

In “I Wanna Be a Champ,” p. 8, Duran Rivera talks about his love for boxing and his desire to turn professional, if only for a few years, to see if he can do it. He trains under the inspirational guidance of a former fighter, the 1950s contender Ludwig Lightburn, and, in an accompanying article, “In the Ring,” gives an inside look at the rigors of the sport.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Duran loves boxing so much that he leaves college to pursue the sport. He feels he



has only a certain number of years to see if he can do it, and he doesn’t want to lose his chance. Is there an activity you love that you feel the same way about? What is it, why do you love it so much, and what are you going to do to pursue it?

—Duran feels very close to his trainer, Ludy Lightburn, who is a very respectful and kind teacher. Have you had that kind of relationship with an adult, who has helped you to learn or get better at something you love? Who is that person, and how has she/he helped you? If you have not had such a person in your life, describe one that you would like to have.

—Boxing is a dangerous sport. Do you think Duran is wise to pursue it? Why or why not?



Roleplay:

—Two students, playing Duran and a friend. The friend thinks that boxing is a cruel and ugly sport, and should be banned. Duran acknowledges that boxing is dangerous, but also thinks the sport has its skillful, graceful side.

Drugs Destroy a Life

Yenny Perez, in “Remembering Maurice,” p. 10, describes how she befriends a neighborhood boy named Maurice, whose father is a drug dealer and user. Maurice becomes involved in gang activity, but another side of him is depressed about his father’s behavior and his difficult family life. When his father leaves rehab and starts using drugs again, Maurice commits suicide, and Yenny struggles to deal with the loss.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Yenny tries to be supportive of Maurice by listening to his problems, but after he dies she feels guilty, thinking she could have done more to prevent the suicide. Do you think Yenny could have done more? Or do you think she is being too hard on herself?

—What might have Maurice done to help his father after he left rehab?

—What makes Yenny gradually feel better after Maurice’s death?

—What is your view of the drug problem?

What can be done—by the police, the community, or the government—to prevent tragedies like these from happening?

Roleplay:

—Two students, playing Yenny and a friend. Yenny feels guilty about Maurice’s death and thinks she could have done more to help. The friend wants her to know that she did what she could, and gives her advice on how to get over her grief.

Widespread Cheating

Fan Yi Mok, in “Why Do So Many Teens Cheat?,” p. 12, knows that Stuyvesant HS is a very competitive place when she transfers there, but she isn’t prepared for the widespread cheating she encounters and the indif-



Be All You Can Be?

On pages 14-15, Roderick Scarlett, in “Weighing the Military Option,” and “I Decided Not to Join the Military,” looks at why teens join the military, and the myths and realities of the benefits the services offer. Roderick was planning to join the Marines until he realized it clashed with his values and learned about affordable college opportunities.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Would you consider joining the military? Why or why not?
- Do you know someone who joined the service? Did they have a positive or negative experience? Describe.

ferent attitudes toward it. She interviews students from several high schools to find out that it’s much the same everywhere. She looks at the reasons kids give for cheating, and in a sidebar (“Cheating Made Me Feel Guilty”) tries to understand why she once did it herself.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- What is your reaction to Fan Yi’s basic point, that cheating is widespread in high school? Do you think it is widespread, or do you think it is less common than she portrays?
- A lot of teens think that cheating is no big deal, that “everyone does it.” What is your reaction to this?
- Students say they feel pressure to cheat because there is so much emphasis on testing and getting good grades. Do you think the blame for cheating lies with the way school is taught, or with the students themselves?
- Fan Yi condemns cheating, yet once cheated herself. What is your reaction to this?

Group activity:

—Students can work in pairs or small groups. Have each group come up with a list of three things that schools can do to lessen cheating by students. They should also come up with list of recommendations of how students caught cheating should be punished. Go around the room, list on the board, and discuss.

Roleplay:

—Two students, playing Roderick and a friend. Roderick’s friend is thinking of joining the military for the college benefits. Roderick has done a little research and thinks there are better ways for her to pursue a college education.

The Repercussions of Divorce

In “Mom’s Boyfriend Makes Home Hell” and “Getting Over My Parents’ Divorce,” by Anonymous, pps. 16-17, the writer describes how her parents’ divorce, while for the better in many ways, has also thrown her into turmoil. She can’t stand her mom’s new boyfriend, and for a long time blamed herself for the breakup. With the help of therapy, she’s become more accepting of the divorce.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Have you experienced divorce in your family? What impact has it had on your life? In what ways can you relate to the writer’s situation?
- The writer has a difficult time adjusting to his mom’s new boyfriend, Earl. Have you been in a similar situation, where a parent had a new boyfriend/girlfriend you didn’t get along with? What happened? How did you handle the situation?
- If you were in the writer’s shoes, who would you handle the conflicts with Earl? What



Writing contest, p. 3:

Encourage students to enter our writing contest, which offers \$175 in prizes:

“If you could be the opposite sex for a day, what would you do? Why?”

You may want to devote part of your class to discussing the topic, before turning to the writing

would you do to try to improve family situation?

—Short of hiding in her room or leaving for college, is there anything else that the writer could do to try to improve the family dynamic?

—The writer, in the article on p. 17, describes going to therapy to get over her parents' divorce. Do you think she'll ever completely get over it? Why or why not?



Turmoil in School

In "New York City Schools Freak Me Out," p. 19, Sabrina Rencher recalls attending school in Haiti, where order and discipline were the rule. When she comes to New York City and enters junior high, she's completely unprepared for the laxness, disrespect, and violence she encounters.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Sabrina has a hard time adjusting to the turmoil and violence of New York City schools. Have you had a hard time in adjusting? Why or why not?

—Does your school have the same problems with violence and conflict that Sabrina's has? If so, what causes these problems? If not, what prevents them from happening in your school?

—Sabrina thinks she's become more inclined to get into fights since going to school in this country. How has your school environment affected you?

—Would you rather go to a school where there is a lot of freedom, or to a school with a lot of rules and discipline, as in Haiti? Explain your position.

Group activity:

—Students can work in pairs or small

groups. Have each group come up with a list of five things schools can do to lessen conflicts and violence between students. The lists should include things that administrators, teachers, and students can do together to lessen the violence. Go around the room, list on the board, and discuss.

Habits Die Hard

In "My Long-Time Companion, My Thumb," (p. 26), Victoria Sorrisio writes how she still sucks her thumb, despite dirty looks from strangers and classmates, and numerous attempts to quit. It may be a little weird, but it sure beats smoking.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—What do you think of Victoria's habit? Is it a little weird? Or is it not much different from other habits?

—Write a letter to Victoria, telling her what you think of how she handles people's reactions to her habit.

—Write about a habit you wish you could give up, and steps you could take to do so.

—Victoria says she will give up sucking her thumb when she's ready. What makes someone ready to give up a habit?

Roleplay:

—Two students, playing Victoria and a friend. Victoria's friend thinks she's very strange to be sucking her thumb and should give it up immediately. Victoria thinks there are worse habits and she'll give it up when she's ready.



Talk Ain't Cheap

In "My Buddy," p. 28, Naomi Hopkins loves her cell phone so much she can't imagine giving it up—although she may have to, if mom gets another whopping bill.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Why do think teens feel the need for cell phones, to keep in constant contact, when, as Naomi admits, most of the calls can wait?

—Do you want a cell phone? Why or why not?

—If you were Naomi's mom, how would you handle the situation with your daughter?

—How would your mother or father handle the situation, if you were Naomi?

—Would you have liked to have lived back in the Stone Age, when kids spoke through oatmeal containers connected by string?

Roleplay:

—Two students, playing Naomi and a friend. Naomi thinks she can't live without her cell phone. Her friend thinks most of her calls can wait and she'd be better off without it.



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:
Youth Communication
224 W. 29th St., 2nd fl.,
New York, NY 10001
212-279-0708 ext.100