



Tips for Teachers

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

May/June 2007

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A Good Activity for Those Last Few Days of School

Writing Contests—Cash Prizes

We have two writing contests in this issue. As the school year winds down, encourage your students to enter and to write their essay in class. (They could all use an extra \$25-\$100 to start the summer, and this is an easy way to get students writing at the end of the year.)

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

Writing Contest #1 What is your favorite place and why?

Deadline: June 29, 2007

Prewriting activity #1: Models of good writing from the last issue of NYC (April 2007).

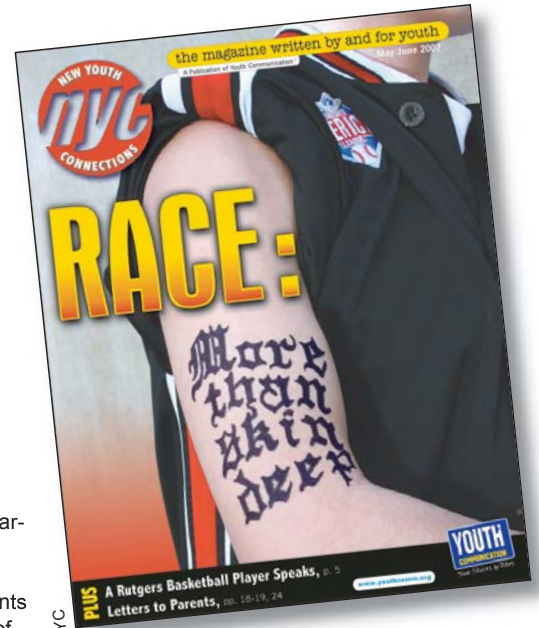
[Note to teachers: If you don't have any copies of the last issue around, these stories are at www.youthcomm.org. Just go the NYC section and scroll down one issue.]

a) Sometimes a place attracts us because of what happens there and the people who are there. "Inside the Airport" by Kanwal Javaid on page 12 of the April issue is a good model. Ask your group what's important to Kanwal about her job site. Does it remind them of any place in their lives?

b) Mention to your group that sometimes we like a place for the way it looks or smells or sounds. Then read the first four paragraphs of April Daley's story "Transported by Books" on page 13 with your group. Ask them to notice how she writes about the smells and sounds of libraries. Ask your group if they like what she wrote.

c) You can also introduce your students to the word *onomatopoeia*, which is type of word that sounds like the action it is describing. "Snap, crackle and pop," from the old Rice Krispies commercials, is perhaps the most famous example. Ask students to note how April uses onomatopoeia to make her description more interesting?

Ask them to think about some of their favorite places. Are there any sounds, smells, tastes, colors or other sensual details they associate with the places? Can they use onomatopoeia to describe their favorite place? You can give them examples: bang, crash, tinkle, buzz, etc.



Prewriting activity #2: Three nouns plus a memory

• Hand out index cards and ask each member of the group to write their favorite place on his/her card. Underneath the place name they should write three nouns and one memory associated with that place. For example, they could write "Central Park" and then "sky, grass, sun" and then "playing Frisbee." Collect the cards, read each card out loud and ask the group to suggest an opening sentence for each card.

Writing Contest #2 What is something your parents did right?

Prewriting activity #1: Brainstorming a list

Write the following on the board:

1. Helped you solve a problem or overcome a challenge
2. Encouraged an interest (e.g., sports, music, reading)
3. Helped you break a bad habit (eating junk food, smoking)
4. Did something that made you feel loved and special
5. Trusted you

Summer Writing Workshops— Deadline Extended to June 11th!

We've extended the deadline for receiving applications to June 11th. You can print an application form from youthcomm.org.

The workshop will run from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., five days a week, from July 2 through August 10. Participants will receive intensive writing and research training from our experienced, full-time instructional staff. The instructor/writer ratio is 5 to 1. The participants will get intensive coaching in writing and reporting skills and will significantly improve their skills. In addition, they'll get to

work side-by-side with peers who are committed to improving their writing and making teen voices heard. Stories by teens in the summer workshop will be published in the fall 2007 issues of *New Youth Connections*.

This is an incredible opportunity for teens to improve their writing skills and to write stories that will help their peers. Please encourage your students to apply. Get the application form at www.youthcomm.org.

Hand out slips of paper or index cards and ask the group to write down one or two sentences about one time their parents helped them in some way. What did the parents do and how did it make them feel? Tell them to refer to the prompts on the board to jog their memories. NOTE: You should also participate in this exercise.

Ask for volunteers to read theirs out loud. Ask the groups if they've had similar experiences. (If you feel comfortable reading your examples aloud, please do so. It can help prime the pump and show the students that everyone, of any age, appreciates some of the things their parents did for them.)

Then give the group 2-3 minutes to write down a paragraph for their essay.

End the session by urging them to write a contest submission based on the opening paragraph and the discussion you just led. If you can, offer to collect the essays the next day and send them to us. (If you think it's a good idea, also encourage them to share their pieces with their parents.)

Prewriting activity #2: Read model stories about parents supporting their children

Two stories in this issue provide examples of parents supporting their children. Reading them will give your students concrete examples of parents helping out their kids.

Encouragement Without Pressure: "My Guitar Speaks for Me," p. 3.

Ask your students to read the story and then ask them to locate the place in the story where the author's father helps him out.

They should see that this happens in the section of the story subtitled "Talking Music With Dad." There are three ways his father helps him:

- The father talks to his son about music, helping to stoke Angel's interest in the subject
- He doesn't pressure Angel to play the guitar when Angel admits he just wants to hang out after school.
- When Angel is ready to start playing he helps him select a guitar and pays for it.

Defending an Unpopular Choice: "Puerto Rican by Blood, Metal by Choice," p. 16

Do the same as above. The places in the story that should get their attention are:

- The top of the third column where she describes how her parents react to her when she first starts going Goth. They don't approve and wished she would stop but they don't threaten her or try to stop her from wearing Goth clothes (except when the family goes out together).
- Further down in the third column where she describes how she starts wearing Goth clothes to family events. Again the family may not like this but they don't pressure her to dress the way she used to.
- Under the part of the story subtitled "Dad Defends Me" where her father tells her uncle to mind his own business after the uncle comments on Tanya's hair color.

Activity Making Decisions, Anticipating Consequences

This lesson uses the story "Offense Taken," p. 8, to show students a way to think about making decisions. They will read the story and then help complete the decision-making process form below. We have already filled it out but your students might have different suggestions as you discuss the story with them. You should present your students with a blank form (right).

1 Identify the decision to be made: The writer, a young black man named Eric Green, has to decide whether or not to tell his friends that he objects to their racially insensitive comments. So far he has mostly not said anything despite the extreme discomfort he feels when his friends make what he considers to be racist remarks.

2 List the possible options:
Option 1: Eric can continue to keep silent or even laugh along at his friends' racist comments.

Option 2: He can ask or tell his friends not to talk like that around him any more.

Option 3: He can ask them questions that would get them thinking about what they are saying, for example, "Do you believe I am too blunt or that I commit crimes?"

3 Consider what will happen if Eric chooses any of the three options.

4 Make a choice. In the story, Eric selects option number 1 while hoping he will "have the courage" to try option 3 someday.

5 Evaluate the choice. Eric keeps his friends but continue to suffer their insensitive remarks.

What to do

- Read the story aloud with your group or have them read it silently.
- Present them with the blank decision chart. Ask them what decision Eric has to make.
- Ask them to come up with some options. They may have different ones than the ones listed above, for example to talk the problem over with an adult (which he does in the story) or walk away when his friends make him uncomfortable.
- Ask them what the positive and negative fallouts would be from each option.
- Ask them what decision Eric

makes.

f) Ask the group what they think about the decision. NOTE: Your students might condemn Eric for his decision and think he is "soft" on his friends. Try to steer them into a discussion of the impact of this decision on Eric, not on whether they like the decision or not. Is Eric better off for the decision he made? Why or why not?

g) Homework. Ask your students to identify a decision they are struggling with, or struggled with in the past. For example: telling their parents about something difficult; breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend; deciding whether to go along with a friend or a group when they feel uncomfortable, etc. Everyone should write down the decision they are struggling with (or recently struggled with) on two separate sheets of paper. On one sheet they should write their name and hand it in to you. For homework, they should take the second sheet and use the decision chart to explore what action they might take. When you are back in class ask for volunteers to go over their charts.

This activity will give you a fascinating glimpse into the kinds of struggles your students face and an appreciation of the complexity of their daily lives. When you are done, you should compliment the group on their strength and courage in managing such challenging issues in their lives. They will feel very affirmed that you recognize that life is not easy for them, and that you respect their efforts to tackle their problems.

Use the chart with another story:

You can also use this activity with "Puerto Rican by Blood, Goth by Choice," p. 16. Tanya Garcia relates what happened when she went from charm bracelets to nose rings.

English teacher bonus: You can apply this chart to many characters in many plays and novels. Macbeth has to decide whether to kill the king or not. Othello has to decide to believe Iago or to trust Desdemona. Winston has to decide whether or not to join the resistance against Big Brother. Try completing a chart for a literary character.

Write a letter to Eric: Ask your students to write a short letter to Eric about his decision and send to us at Youth Communication, 224 West 29th St. 2nd Floor, NY, NY 10001. We will print suitable letters in the next issue.



Options	Positive consequences	Negative consequences
1: Eric can continue to keep silent or even laugh along at his friends' racist comments.	Eric won't have fights with valued friends. He won't risk losing friends.	He will continue to feel insecure and negative about his own race.
2: He can ask or tell his friends not to talk like that around him any more.	His friends might stop their remarks without quarreling with him about it. They may respect his views and respect him more. He won't have to listen to racist comments from them.	His friends might laugh at his concerns or stop hanging out with him. He might quarrel with them and lose their friendship.
3: He can ask them questions that would get them thinking about what they are saying, for example, "Do you believe I am too blunt or that I commit crimes?"	These questions might start calm conversations about Eric's feelings. They might stop or tone down their comments.	They won't get the point of his questions or resent them. They will continue their remarks and resent Eric for asking questions.

English Regents Lesson (next page)

Note to teachers: As you know, the English Regents has a reading and writing section that requires the student to read a passage, answer multiple choice questions about it, and write an essay using the ideas and information in the reading passage.

This exercise will give your students some practice on the test and more importantly will get them thinking about the use of the "N-word" by young African-Americans and other young people. NOTE: You can just use the multiple choice part.

You can use this lesson even if you are not preparing your group for the Regents. It will get your students to read about an issue that affects many of them and get them thinking about the power of language.

Answer key: 1) d 2) b 3) a 4) d 5) b 6) c 7) c 8) a 9) b

Hand out (Below)

Options	Positive consequences	Negative consequences
1: Eric can continue to keep silent or even laugh along at his friends' racist comments.		
2: He can ask or tell his friends not to talk like that around him any more.		
3: He can ask them questions that would get them thinking about what they are saying, for example, "Do you believe I am too blunt or that I commit crimes?"		

Regents Practice Quiz

Directions

Read the story “The N-word is not in my Vocabulary” on page 9, answer the multiple-choice questions, and write a response based on the situation described below. You can take notes as you read.

The Situation: Your City Council member is preparing to vote on a bill that would ban the word “nigger” from being used in and around schools. Some people are telling your council member that using the word is good because it reminds people of past injustices, makes the word less degrading by making it more common, and its prohibition would violate the right to free speech. Others are saying that the word degrades African-Americans, makes young people less sensitive to how some white people used (and still use) the word, and make adults from both races think poorly of black young people.

Your task: Using information from the story, write a letter to your council member recommending whether he or she should vote for or against the bill and explain the reasons for your position.

Be sure to:

- Tell your audience what they need to know about using the N-word
- Recommend whether your council member should vote for or against the bill
- Explain the reasons for your position
- Use information from the story and indicate any words taken directly from the story by using quotation marks or referring to the author

Multiple Choice Questions

Why does the author’s friend use the N-word?

- He’s influenced by black entertainers
- It makes him feel cool
- Everyone at school uses it
- He thinks it makes the word less powerful

2) What was the biggest influence on the author not to use the word?

- Hearing it used at school
- Her parents
- The book she quotes in her story
- Black city council members

3) The word “chronicled” in the next to last paragraph in the first column means

- Told the story of
- Condemned
- Approved
- Ignored

4) The New York City Council passed a resolution to

- Ban the word in city schools
- Stop entertainers from using it on TV and the radio
- Make sure the history of the word is taught in city schools
- Encourage people to think about the word before using it

5) How did the author and her friend Jeff resolve their disagreement over the word?

- He stopped using the word
- They didn’t change each other’s mind
- They ended their friendship
- She began to see his point of view

6) According to the book that the author uses in the story, the “N word”...

- Was always used by blacks to address each other
- Started out as a neutral term then became negative later on
- Was always negative
- Was based on a Greek word meaning slave

7) How would you categorize the author’s family use of the word?

- They use it to show how horrible it is
- They never use it.
- They use it sometimes to take out their anger against certain individuals
- They use it but never at home

8) What is proof to the author of the word’s degrading power?

- Reaction of black people when white people use it
- Current controversy about the word
- The resolution by the City Council
- The argument between the author and her friend

9) According to the author, what will happen if young people keep using the word?

- The City Council might have to ban it
- Young black people won’t be respected by people of other races
- Other races will think it’s ok to use the word
- Young people will keep fighting with their parents

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

youthcomm.org

Tips for Teachers is also available on our website at:

www.youthcomm.org