



Tips for Teachers

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

November 2002

Writing Contest— \$175 in Prizes

Writing Contest, p. 2: Encourage your students to enter this month's Writing Contest, which offers \$175 in prizes. The topic is:

“What would a movie about your life be like and who would play you?”

Point out to your students that good movies, like good novels and plays, deal with conflict. For example, two people want the same thing and fight over it. Or someone tries to stop another person from doing something. What conflicts would their movie present? Would the movie be about one important incident in their life or deal with a longer time period? What is the title? Encourage creativity: maybe the contest submission can be in the form of a review of the imaginary movie. Or it could be a proposal to a movie studio arguing why his/her life would make a great movie.

Deadline: November 18

THIS ISSUE'S THEME:

It's a Family Affair

In the following stories, several writers examine their relations with family. They address a wide range of experiences and emotions.

Losing a Brother

In “My Brother Kareem,” p. 3, Destiny Cox writes about her loving relationship with her brother Kareem, who is her best friend. When Kareem is stabbed to death at age 24, she and her family are devastated. Destiny turns to writing to try to ease her pain.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Have you experienced the death of a family member or friend? How was your experience similar to Destiny's? How was it different?

—Circle a sentence or paragraph in Destiny's story that you relate to the most. Why do you relate to it?

—Destiny says she was in denial after her brother's death, expecting him to come home. Did you have similar feelings after a family member or friend passed away? In what ways?

—Destiny turns to writing to try to heal her grief. What (or who) did you turn to for help after a similar experience in your life?

—Destiny finds a “silver lining” in her brother's death: she feels she's a stronger person and lives every day to the fullest. Was there a silver lining for you? Why or why not?

Food Fights

In “I've Got a Beef With Meat,” p. 6, Elizabeth Sanchez describes the difficulty of being a vegetarian Latina. The culture empha-



Stephanie Wilson

sizes meat dishes, and Elizabeth has to endure her family's continuous teasing.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Elizabeth is different from her family because she doesn't eat meat, and ends up getting teased by them. How are you different from your family? How do they react to your differences?

—Elizabeth finds it hard being a vegetarian because Latin culture puts a big emphasis on eating meat. Are there aspects of your culture that you've broken away from or find it hard to go along with? How have you broken away, and how do people react to your choices?

—After reading Elizabeth's description of animal diseases and how livestock animals are treated, would you consider becoming a vegetarian? Why or why not?

—How do you feel about the way Elizabeth's family teases her? If you were Elizabeth, how would you respond to their teasing?

Tips for Teachers is also available on our web site at:

www.youthcomm.org

A note on the lessons

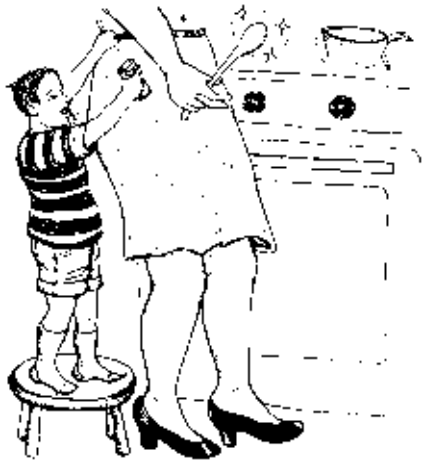
The following lessons are designed to promote reflection on issues raised by the stories in *NYC*. Each story is summarized briefly, followed by prompts that can be used to initiate discussion and/or brief writing assignments. In some cases, where we think a question is particularly suited for writing, we indicate that. In addition, role plays and group exercises are sometimes suggested for more active learning experiences.

A note on the roleplays

You will need two or three teens to act out the suggested roleplays in front of class. Make sure the young people understand their roles by briefly reviewing the characters in the stories. Each participant has to try to convince the other of her point of view as described in the roleplay. Let the roleplay 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

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 in a general discussion.



Shaun Shishido

Mom's Magical Meals

In "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," p. 7, Fabio Botarelli is lucky to have a mother who is a wonderful cook. Inspired by her marvelous creations, he gradually learns to make his own delicious specialties.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Who does the cooking in your family? What are your favorite meals?

—Do you like to cook? Why or why not? Fabio's mother says it's important to learn to cook, so you can take care of yourself (and not go broke in restaurants). Do you agree or disagree?

—In learning to cook, Fabio finds that it's

like any other skill—it takes a lot of practice and he makes a lot of mistakes (including getting cut and burned). Is there something you're good at now, that was very hard to learn? What is it, and what inspired you to keep going despite the difficulties?

Roleplay: two students, playing Fabio and a friend. The friend thinks the kitchen is a place for women, not men. Fabio disagrees.



Gary Smith

Losing an Aunt to AIDS

Desirée Guéry, in "A Sad Silence," p. 8, is left out of a family secret: her beloved aunt has AIDS. It's not until she learns about AIDS in school that Desirée really understands the seriousness of the disease. But her aunt passes away without ever speaking to Desirée about her illness. In a sidebar on the same page, "Too Afraid to Trust," Desirée describes how her aunt's death has affected her attitudes toward sexual intimacy and trust.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Desiree is the only one in her family who doesn't know her aunt has AIDS. Has your family ever kept a secret from you? What was the secret, and why did your family not tell you the truth? How did you feel about being kept in the dark?

—Has a family member ever had a serious illness? How did the family deal with it? How did the experience affect you?

—After Desirée finds out about her aunt's illness, the aunt never discusses it with Desirée. Why do you think the aunt didn't open up to Desirée? Have you ever been in a similar situation, where a family member or friend didn't want to talk about something difficult in her life? Did the person eventually open up to you?

—Have you ever known someone who has HIV or AIDS? How was your experience similar to or different from Desirée's?

—After her aunt's death, Desirée doesn't feel like dating or having sex, because she feels she can't trust anyone. What is your reaction to this? Have you ever felt the same way?

What caused you to feel that way?

—Even after she gets married someday, Desiree doesn't think she'll be able to trust her husband. Do you think her fear is reasonable? Why or why not?

A Lesbian Foster Parent

Arelis Rosario, in "Something About Mary," p. 9, writes about the best foster mom she's ever known, who just happens to be gay.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Why does Arelis like Mary? How does she say Mary is different from other foster parents she's had?

—How does Mary solve problems in her foster home? How does that compare with the way your parents solve problems in your home?

—How does Mary make the holidays special for her foster children?

Writing: Would you consider being a foster parent someday? If so, why? If not, why not?

Roleplay: Arelis and a social worker from her agency. The social worker doesn't like Mary as a foster parent because she's a lesbian. Arelis wants the social worker to know why being a lesbian has nothing to do with being a good foster parent.



Karolina Zaniesienko

Going Wild

Jennifer Ramos, in "Running from Myself," p. 12, is unpopular as a child and doesn't fit in. When she goes to live with her father for a summer, she falls into a rebellious life, partying and abusing alcohol and drugs. She gradually regains control of her life when she begins to accept herself.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—As a younger child, Jennifer is overweight, very shy, and isn't part of the "in crowd."

A Quick Way to Get Everyone Writing:

Letters to the Editor: We welcome letters to the editor and publish most of them. 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 articles in *NYC*. Use these prompts to get your students started (a few sentences on one or more of these points will be sufficient for a letter):

“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...”

Have you ever felt that isolated or lonely? What did you do to deal with it? Were you able to make friends eventually and fit in? Why or why not?

—Have you ever, like Jennifer, done negative things to fit in with the “cool crowd”? How did you feel about it at the time? How do you feel about it now?

—Eventually, the “cool kids” turn against Jennifer and make fun of her. Why do you think they turned against her?

—Why does Jennifer start to change? What does she do to help herself?

—Jennifer feels better when she’s able to accept herself and be herself. How hard is it for you to be yourself? What makes it hard? Are you able to “be your own person” around others? Why or why not?

—Eventually, Jennifer starts feeling closer to her mother. Have you ever felt alienated from a parent or family member? Were you able to overcome your distance and grow closer? If so, how did you do it? If not, why not?

Dad’s in Jail

In “Growing Up With Pops in Prison”, p. 19, Antwaun Garcia writes about having a father who was in jail during most of his childhood. At first they keep in contact, then the letters stop and Antwaun feels alienated from the man who isn’t there for him. But when his father finally gets out of jail, Antwaun finds he can have him in his life “without being angry.”

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Antwaun said his father sold drugs because it was the only way for him to survive. Do you agree? Was it the only way for him to survive? Why or why not?

—Antwaun writes: “No matter what bad things or situations you’ve been in, the good ones last forever.” What good times stand out for you, in your memories of your parents?

—Antwaun isn’t ashamed to tell people his father is in prison. Would you feel the same way? Why or why not?

—Even though he hates his father for not being in his life, Antwaun also needs him. He forgives his father, so he can have him in his



Stephanie Wilson

life “without being angry.” Have you ever had similar mixed feelings about a parent? How do you feel about that parent now?

Writing: Have you ever been separated from a parent, like Antwaun was (maybe not because of prison, but for another reason)? What impact has it had on you? Write a short letter to that person, explaining your feelings about being separated.

Grandma’s Example

On p. 26, Sara Said, in “Jidda’s Strength, Courage, and Wisdom,” writes about her loving relationship with her grandmother, who remains in Yemen when Sara comes to the U.S. The



Cezary Ladocha

grandmother inspires Sara with her wisdom and strength.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Sara has a lot of memories of her grandmother. What memories do you have of your grandparents (or what have you been told about them)?

—Sara has been separated from her grandmother for six years. Have you ever been separated from a family member or close friend? How did you deal with the separation? How did you keep in touch? How did the separation affect your relationship?

—Sara learns a lot about her grandmother’s strength and courage from her story about the lion (or leopard). What family stories are your favorites? Why are they your favorites? What have you learned about your family from these stories?

Other Stories

The Trouble With Cliques

In “Nasty Girls,” p. 5, Alice Wong describes how she befriended a group of popular girls in the sixth grade. She finds that the clique is mean to other people, but Alice is afraid to speak up because she doesn’t want to lose their friendship. When the clique turns on her, she realizes it was more important to be herself.



Karolina Zaniesienko

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Did you ever join a clique or a group in order to be popular and fit in? What was the clique like? Did you feel comfortable being part of it? Why or why not?

—Did you ever belong to a group that did things you didn’t agree with? Did you speak up to the group about them? Why or why not?

—When the clique rejects Alice, it makes it hard for her to trust anyone. Did you have an experience with friends that made it hard for you to trust others? Were you able to trust peo-

ple again? If so, how? If not, why not?

—Which is more important to you and your sense of self-worth: being accepted by others, or doing what you think is best for yourself? Is it possible to have both? If so, how? If not, why not?



Ian P. Jones II and V.J. Wong

Life After High School

In “The Senior Pages,” pages 10-11, three writers describe their plans—and fears—after they graduate from high school. One writer plans to join the military, another looks forward to the joy of studying literature, and a third is scared out of her mind, because she has no idea what she wants to do.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Keshia is scared because she has no idea what she wants to do after she graduates. Are you clear about what you want to do? Or are you undecided and scared, like Keshia?

—Are you pressured by family or friends about college and/or choosing a career? In what ways? How does this pressure affect you?

—What do you feel would be the best way for Keshia to find out what she wants to do?

—Elizabeth says that part of her is scared to take on adult responsibilities, while another part is ready for the challenge. Do you feel scared, or ready to take on the challenge (or both)? Why?

—What do you think of Elizabeth’s reasons for wanting to join the military? Have you ever considered doing the same thing? Why or why not?

—Nell loves Sister Joan’s class, because she’s learning literature for the love of it, not because it’s something she has to do. Have you ever felt that excited by a school subject (or by something you learned outside of school)? Why did you love the subject so much? How does it figure into your future plans?

—Which of these three writers do you relate to the most? Why?

The Rapture of Rap

In “Booty Bouncing With My Crew” and “In Battle Rap, I Got Jigga’s Back,” pages 14-15, Cristina Cosme and Reginald Cazeau write about their love of rap and all that goes with it: the parties, the lyrics, and the battles between rival rappers.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Cristina says some of her best memories are related to hip-hop music. What are your best music memories?

—Cristina loves sharing hip-hop with her friends because it unites them and makes them happy. How does music unite you with friends? Does it ever come between you? In what ways?

—The battle between Jay-Z and Nas was a big deal at Reginald’s school. What music battles are big at your school?

—Reginald sides with Jay-Z and not Nas. Which one do you side with?

—Who are the best rappers, in your opinion? Who are the most overrated ones?

Group activity: students can work in pairs or small groups. Divide the groups according to their admiration of certain rappers. Tell the groups they have to come up with reasons



Vita Ayala

(such as examples of lyrics) about why their rapper is the best. Go around the room, have groups share their reasons, and discuss.



Frantz D. Bordes

A Love of Singing

Nurys Benzant, in “Singing Is Believing,” p. 18, describes how she begins singing in a church choir and eventually overcomes her fear to perform solo. Singing expresses her connection to God.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Although she has a good voice, Nurys is shy about singing. Have you ever had a talent in something, but were shy about expressing it? What was the talent? Did you become more comfortable about expressing it? Why or why not?

—Nurys is more comfortable singing after she feels a strong connection to it through her religion. What helps you feel a strong connection to your talents or interests (such as sharing it with others, or getting praise from others, for example)?

—Have you ever performed in front of others? What was the experience like?



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

www.youthcomm.org