



Tips for Teachers

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

November 2004

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This issue has several powerful stories on building an identity—the essential developmental task for teens. A common theme in the stories is feeling like a misfit, followed by the struggle to find a balance between fitting in and learning to be true to oneself. Stories that explore this theme include:

Hispanic Hockey Fiend, p. 8: A Latino boy describes how he came to love this stereotypically white sport.

Losing My Best Friend to the Rebels, p. 11: A reflection on the pain of drifting away from childhood friends, especially when they seem to be growing up more quickly and having more fun.

Teaching Church School—But Not Religious, p. 13: The writer's feelings about her faith change as she grows up.

He Speaks, He Scores!, p. 14: A klutzy boy finds his niche in debate.

Defending America, Questioning Its Actions, p. 15: A U.S. teen living in Germany, confronted by anti-American sentiment after the invasion of Iraq, has to come up with her own definition of patriotism.

Can I Be a Team Player?, p. 16: A shy, proud, and introverted young man learns to become part of a team.

Sucked Into Xanga's Online World, p.

23: A young woman assesses the gains and losses she suffered during her addiction to this online blog.

Lessons for some of these stories follow.

The Horns of a Dilemma: Lesson in Critical Thinking

The anonymous writer of "My Friend or My Church—How Do I Choose?" describes a very difficult dilemma: She feels caught between her religion's disapproval of homosexuality, and the fact that several of her friends are gay. It seems to her that to accept her religion she must reject her friends, or vice versa. 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.

Materials: "My Friend or My Church—How Do I Choose?" story (p. 3), black-board/flip chart, paper, pens.

Methods: reading, note taking, guided discussion.

Lesson

Write "Caught on 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

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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 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 by 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 girl 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.

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

www.youthcomm.org

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A letter to the editor is a great “do now” writing exercise. It requires the student to *read* the story and *write* something thoughtful in response. You can give the students as little or as much guidance as you like. You can ask students to select any story, or consider having them respond to *Losing My Best Friend to the Rebels*, by Lily Mai, p. 11—which deals with a universal issue. Lily’s a “good girl,”

quiet and “innocent.” But her best friend is increasingly getting into more adult-like behavior, such as drinking, smoking, playing in bands, and doing other “wild and adventurous” things. Lily wants to “open up” more, but at the same time she wants to stay true to herself.

Ask your students: What should she do? Why? Have them send letters to Lily with their thoughts.

—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 the problem associated with each choice and how the two choices are in conflict.

2. Read the story and analyze the dilemma faced by Anonymous.

Introduce the story by explaining to the students that this writer faces a conflict between two values: loyalty to her church, and loyalty to friends and family.

Ask students to write two headings, side by side at the top of a sheet of paper, titled: “Loyalty to church” and “Loyalty to friends/family.”

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

[Here are examples of what could go in the two columns. For “Church,” see especially paragraphs 1, 3, and 5 in the section “God and My Church Are There for Me.” For “Friends,” see paragraph 3 in the “Pastor said...” section, various lines from the “Straight Talk...” section, and various lines from the “I Have to Tell You Something...” section.]

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 church, but also to her mother, her mother’s friends, and especially to Julian and her other three gay friends.

Now ask students: “What’s the dilemma?” The simple answer is that her church thinks homosexuality is a sin. Meanwhile, she and her mother have many gay friends who they don’t see as “sinful.” But for the writer, the situation is actually a bit more complex. Push your students to see the complexities. Here are some examples. (You can get the students to focus on these by asking leading questions, if necessary.)

1) The writer does not think being gay is a *choice*, which makes her question whether it is a sin at all.

2) The writer worries that if she disagrees with her church on one issue then she might start to question more of the

teachings, which she doesn’t want to do.

What do your students think of the writer’s logic? If being gay is not a choice—i.e., if God made people gay—should she question whether it is a sin? If you question one teaching of the church, do you have to question them all? Can you question some teachings and still be a member of the church? (To prompt this discussion, you might point out that many Catholics take birth control or get abortions, but still consider themselves Catholics, for example.)

Finally, ask the students how the writer resolves the problem. (She decides not to make a choice, for now, between friends and church.) Ask the class if they think this is a good resolution. Why or why not? [Note: One could argue that the writer is being hypocritical to stay in her church if she disagrees with this teaching. Or, one could argue that no one is ever in complete agreement with any institution so keeping an open or skeptical mind is OK. There are many other possible arguments.] *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.* Also, students are sure to argue with the church’s teaching or with the writer’s belief that homosexuality is not a choice. Try to minimize those arguments. 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 loy-

Writing Contest

We run an essay contest with cash prizes in each issue and we publish excerpts from the winners in the next issue. The contest question is always on page 2. This month’s contest question is:

“If you could invent something, what would it be? How would it work?”

You can use the question to practice writing the classic five paragraph essay. The first paragraph might begin with a brief description of the invention and the role it would fill. Each of the next three paragraphs would present one reason why the inventor wants to create his/her idea. You might help your students think about the reasons with

some simple brainstorming exercises like making a list on the board. Some possible reasons include benefiting humanity, money, fame, scientific achievement, solving a personal problem, showing off. The last paragraph would summarize the benefits of the invention.

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alty—for which there may be no easy or right answer.

Follow-up assignment (short essay)

Ask students to take one of the 3 examples above, such as the dating dilemma—or an example from their own life—and write a short essay. They can model it on the story by Anonymous. If you like, suggest this structure to them:

1. Introduce the dilemma by briefly explaining the two sides.
2. Write several paragraphs about one horn of the dilemma, just as Anonymous did. The section “God and My Church are There for Me” is a good model for them to follow.
3. Write several paragraphs about the other horn of the dilemma. The section “I Have to Tell You Something” could be a model.
4. Write a conclusion that summarizes the arguments and tells what they are going to do. (Use the “If I Choose, I Lose” section as a model.)

Remind students: In their final section, the students have three choices: a) They can resolve the dilemma by choosing one side or the other; b) they can find a “third way” to solve the problem that bypasses or resolves the dilemma; c) they can live with the contradiction, like Anonymous did.

Compare and Contrast

In “A Question of Faith,” p. 13, Janill Briones also has a dilemma related to religious faith. As she’s gotten older the faith aspects of Catholicism have become less important to her, but the cultural aspects of the religion are still very important to her. Her dilemma: She wonders whether it’s right for her to teach Sunday school when she’s not committed to the faith. What do your students think? Why? How might the priest feel about her dilemma, and what would he say to her? What might her students feel about the dilemma, and what would they suggest she do?

Helping Students Recognize the Traits of Resilience

He Speaks, He Scores!, by Daniel Kingsley, p. 13

Researchers have identified many traits that are associated with resiliency. Helping teens to identify and name these traits in others can help them to see them

Vocabulary Lesson

Daniel uses some big words. Most of them can be figured out from context clues. But depending on the level of your class, you may want to review these before they read the story:

Deficient	Pondered	Emphasize
Hierarchy	Eloquently	Travesty
Excelled	Moderator	Blunder
Impromptu	Garbled	
Deities	Emulate	

in themselves—and then to build upon them. In this story, Daniel describes how he shifted his energies from athletics to debating. His story illustrates some classic resilient attitudes and behaviors. Following are definitions of several “resiliencies” (from the Youth Communication book, *The Struggle to Be Strong*) and how they are illustrated in Daniel’s story

Trait: Insight means “asking tough questions of yourself and giving honest answers.” Daniel acknowledges to himself that he’ll never be an athlete. He sees things as they really are, not as he wishes they would be.

Trait: Independence means “being your own person, and keeping an appropriate emotional distance between you and the pressures of others.” Daniel has the emotional strength to throw himself into an activity which some young men might consider nerdy.

Trait: Initiative means “taking action, meeting challenges, solving problems.” When he realizes that he’s doomed as an athlete, Daniel doesn’t mope. Instead, he actively seeks out a challenge more suited to his skills and interests.

Trait: Humor means “finding what’s funny, even when you’re sad or in pain. It also involves the ability to laugh at yourself.” Daniel knows he’s flawed in many ways. Part of the appeal of his story is the humor with which he describes some of his failed attempts at sports and debate.

To teach this as a resilience lesson: Write the four traits and the brief definitions on the board or on a handout. Ask students to read the story (or read it aloud), and have them write the name of each trait in the margin each time they see it. Discuss.

Follow-up activity. Ask students to

identify a time they’ve used the traits above. Ask them to pick one trait and write a few paragraphs describing how they used it. Remind the students that these are strengths they’ve developed and use to succeed in the world. Everyone has them, but we all have different ones in different proportions. Learning to recognize your own strengths—and how to use them—can help you be more successful.

Selected Other Stories

Sucked Into Xanga’s Online World, by Jenny Yu Fan, p. 22

In case you don’t know, Xanga (and its biggest competitor, Live Journal) are websites where you can keep a journal which can be totally public, or shared with a designated group of friends. For many teens (the vast majority of users are teens or young adults) it’s a fun and fascinating way for a group to keep in touch, even if they can’t see or talk to each other each day. Our writer describes becoming obsessed with her Xanga life, to the point where she felt like she was “losing part of herself.” Instead of complementing face-to-face interaction, her web life began to replace it.

Ask your students if they have journals on Xanga or Live Journal or other blog sites. What is the appeal? What do they get out of them? How much time do they spend on them? Does it help them connect with others like themselves, find out they’re not “weird,” etc. Does it isolate them in some ways?

A Home in the Hood, by Anonymous, p. 10

With the help of Habitat for Humanity (and her family’s own labor) the writer moves from the projects into a single family house. She acknowledges that she still lives in the “ghetto” in a row of “boring,” identical houses. But the advantages are great. She has her own room. There are two bathrooms. She has a front and back yard. Owning the house means that it’s worth spending money to upgrade it.

The writer continues to visit family members who live in the projects, but she prefers her new house and thinks the government should have more programs to help people from the projects. What do your students think? Are single family homes better than the projects? Should people get help to buy homes? Should they have to contribute, as the writer’s family did, to helping build their homes?

Practice Lesson for Regents Exam Reading Section

Use story: "Long-Distance Patriot," p. 15

What the teacher needs to know: The Regents English exam has a reading section. One part of the test asks students to complete multiple choice questions based on two reading passages. (This lesson uses only one passage.)

To Do: Have your group read the story on page 15. Then have them complete the questions below.

Here are the answers to the multiple choice questions:

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

↑ TO THE TEACHER: COVER THIS SECTION BEFORE COPYING ↑

Long Distance Patriot

Multiple Choice Questions

1) What adjective best describes the initial German reaction to the 9/11 attacks?

- a) indifferent
- b) sympathetic
- c) fearful
- d) puzzled

2) According to the author what event first prompted Germans to view America more negatively?

- a) American bombing of Afghanistan
- b) American rejection of an environmental treaty
- c) the invasion of Iraq
- d) the Vietnam War

3) How does the author react to her teacher's hostility toward the United States?

- a) agrees with him in class
- b) argues with him in class
- c) ignores him
- d) disagrees silently

4) Which statement would the author agree with?

- a) Governments always look after the best interests of its citizens.
- b) Americans deserve their bad reputation in Germany.
- c) A good citizen should be respectful of her government but also skeptical of its actions.
- d) German teens hate American culture.

5) What did the author do to counter the stereotypes exhibited by her German classmates?

- a) wrote a letter to a newspaper
- b) spoke out in class
- c) organized a demonstration
- d) nothing

6) According to the author what part of American culture did her classmates like?

- a) sports, especially baseball
- b) television
- c) comics
- d) music

7) The author mentions the Vietnam War to

- a) explain her opposition to invading Iraq
- b) demonstrate how she was becoming more skeptical about her government
- c) explain part of her German friends' anti-Americanism
- d) give an example of American global dominance

8) What best describes the author's attitudes toward America prior to 2001?

- a) proud but skeptical of its policies
- b) indifferent
- c) very upbeat
- d) confused

9) What statement would the author be least likely to agree with?

- a) Germans were unfair in their criticism of America.
- b) She was usually too timid to argue against anti-American comments.
- c) Every country has done something undesirable.
- d) Criticizing your country is unpatriotic.