



Tips for Teachers

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

November 2006

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Writing Contests

If you submit a class set, be sure each entry is accompanied by the name, address, etc. information in the entry form on page 2 so we can contact your student if he or she is a winner.

Contest question #1: How has war (the war in Iraq or any other war) affected you or a member of your family?

Deadline: November 13.

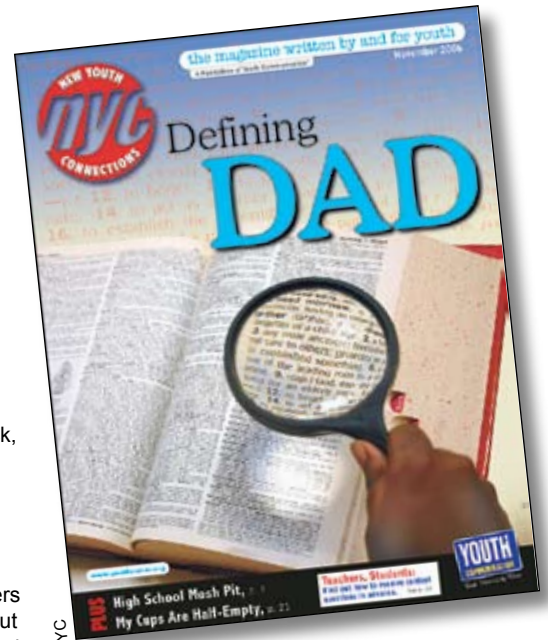
For many teens, the war is an abstraction. They may be for it, against it, or not care. (They are welcome to write about why the war is *not* a big issue for them, if that's the case.) For some teens, however, this question may trigger deep emotions or worries about loved ones. You might ask your class if any students have family members or acquaintances in the armed services. Then ask if any of the people they know are in a war zone, or have been in one. Consider having a short but sensitive discussion that acknowledges their feelings. Then,

consider having a more general discussion about the war and how teens are or aren't affected by it. You could point out that two reasons people may feel disconnected from this war is that there is no draft (like during the Vietnam War), and no rationing of gasoline or some foods (like during WWII). Consider asking if the students realize that like in the WTC attack, most of the people who killed in Iraq were innocent civilians, not soldiers.

To recap: Students can write about why they don't feel the war affects them; they can write about direct ways they are affected, such as by having family members in the armed forces; or they can write about indirect ways they are affected, such as feeling vulnerable after 9/11, or other strong feelings, pro or con, about the war itself.

Submit class sets or the best essays to NYC by October 2. (Students can e-mail essays to hvanderberg@youthcomm.org)

Contest question #2: Tell us about your best or worst holiday memory.



Deadline: January 2, 2007

Start a discussion by asking the group to make a list of major holidays in their families. This could include American holidays like Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July; religious holidays like Christmas, Yom Kippur, or Ramadan; and ethnic holidays like Chinese New Year and Kwanzaa. If your class is diverse, ask teens to briefly describe their holidays to their peers.

Pre-writing activity: Tell students that a good essay will focus on two things: the events and the emotions. A good essay will also include important details that help the reader feel like she is really there.

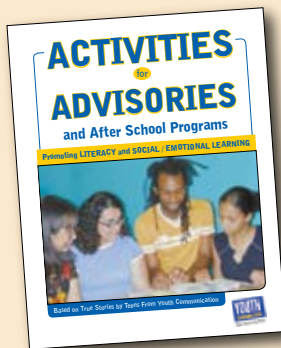
A good essay will include at least these four elements: events, emotions, details, and reflection.

Have students make a simple writing web. Put the holiday in the center of the day. Then surround it with events of the day (things that happened, or "scenes"). Then, for each event, attach one or two emotions associated with it.

One way help spur students' memories of a holiday is to focus on sensual details. In addition to their web, have students make a list of the five senses on the board. Ask them to

NEW: Lessons for Advisories!

We've just published a new collection of lessons to use in advisories. It includes 24 well-documented lessons. All of the lessons are built around reading teen-written story from Youth Communication. Most of the lessons encourage students to think about important social and emotional issues, such as trust, betrayal, anger management, and being true to oneself. The activities are designed to keep students interested. They include role plays, mock trials, debates, Bingo games,



freewriting, creating timelines, and more. Themes include friendship, relations with family, careers, AIDS/HIV, and many others.

The 160-page manual, *Activities for Advisories and After School Programs* is only \$24.95. It comes with copying privileges for classroom use and is bound in a three-ring binder for easy copying. See advertisement on page 11 of this issue, or

go to the Youth Communication web store at www.youthcomm.org to order copies.

Tips for Teachers is also available on our website at:
www.youthcomm.org

write down two holiday memories linked to each sense. Here are some sample prompts:

"I can still smell the _____ at _____ (the holiday period)."

"The (holiday) always meant the taste of my (relative's) cooking."

"The _____ and the _____ looked so beautiful in the living room."

"The sound of _____ reminded me it was time to celebrate _____."

Then, ask students to think about an insight they gained during a holiday. For example, they could write that, "Seeing my grandfather at the head of the table, telling the same old stories, I realized for the first time that these stories are the glue that holds the family together."

Have students look at their lists of events, emotions, sensations, and reflections. This should provide plenty of raw material for a wonderful holiday essay.

Girls and Body Image

(Note: Please use your judgment and knowledge of the maturity level of your class to decide whether to conduct this lesson in an all-girls group, such as in a single-sex health class or a mixed group.)

Goal: Use the story on page 21, "My Cups Are Half-Empty," by Andrea Guscott to prompt discussion and writing about healthy body image.

Story summary: For the first two-thirds of the story, Andrea comically frets about what her flat chest. In the end, though, she still yearns for larger breasts, she realizes her anatomical endowments aren't all that important. Along the way she cleverly and humorously pokes fun at the whole issue by using 19 terms to describe her breasts.

Ice Breaker: Before using the story or introducing the topic, hand out a piece of paper to each student. Ask them to write the one thing about their body they would most like to change. Then have them crumple their paper into a ball and throw it at something in the front of the room: blackboard, desk (or even you if you feel comfortable being pelted). Pick up the balls, uncrumple them, and read all or some

Other Free Stories From the Archives

Looking for stories your students will want to read but on a topic you don't find in this month's NYC? Our website, www.youthcomm.org, has scores of great stories on immigration, dating, community service, activism, and dozens of other topics. NYC subscribers can download them, copy them, and use them with students.



Patricia Battles

of the items. If you find a few that refer to breasts, set them aside to read last. And then say, "I have a short article by a girl that we are going to read and it's about her discomfort with her breasts." If you don't find a breast reference announce that you are surprised no one brought it up and you have a short article etc.

Reading the story: It can be read aloud by an average reader in under five minutes. Read it aloud yourself or take turns around the room. There are a few words you might have to define or make sure your students understand: *affliction* in the third paragraph, *enhancing* in the third also, *delusion* in the second paragraph of the third column, *acknowledgement* in the second paragraph of the last column.

As the reading proceeds, gauge the group's reactions. Are they laughing? Frowning? Rolling their eyes? Nodding?

Abridged from the March, 2001 issue of *New Youth Connections*

Big Breasts Are No Blessing

By Rasheeda Raji

For years, I've had to deal with having big breasts. Many people tell me I'm lucky, that being busty is supposed to be a blessing. But I've found it difficult to be left alone because of this alleged gift.

I started to develop when I was 11, although I denied that my body was changing until I was almost 13. With my new development, I could now be employed by one of the best strip clubs in the city, or make great tips as a waitress at Hooters. I felt freakishly odd because people started to make comments about my chest. Once, I was just hanging around a bunch of male friends when one of them blurted out, "Got Milk?" At first I laughed, because I can laugh at myself every once in a while. But that joke lost its humor well before the millionth time. I felt like an object, not a person, and, even worse, I felt like a slut.

After a couple of years, I learned to push the comments to the back of my mind. I got sick of crying about every remark. No one seemed to care and the tears weren't

doing a thing for me. Until I turned 15, I wore big, oversized clothing to hide my boobs. My wardrobe consisted of floppy sweatshirts and T-shirts since I didn't bother to look in the female section when I went shopping.

But three years ago, when I was 15, I had a revelation. One night, when I was at my best friend's house, she asked me why I always covered up. She thought I was ashamed of my body. I told her I wasn't, and I just happened to like baggy clothes. Honestly, I was ashamed, but in denial. I didn't realize that until then: I covered up because I was embarrassed about the size of my breasts.

A couple of hours after leaving her house, I realized I was sick of always looking like a boy. I thought to myself, "I'm not a guy, and God made me this way, so why should I be ashamed?" But I was still sensitive about my bustiness. That's why I attempted to maintain some distance from boys. I didn't date. I couldn't tell if a guy was really interested in me or my DDs, so I didn't bother trying to figure it out.

Thankfully, by the time I was 16, my male and female friends were more sensitive to my feelings.

I'm puzzled when someone says, "I wish I were your size." Why would anyone want something the size of honeydews hanging from her body? Why would anyone want the first thing people associated with them to be their breasts?

Some people have suggested I get a breast reduction, but I don't like the idea of unnecessary surgery, so that's out of the question for now. If I develop unbearable back pains in the future, though, then I'd consider the operation.

And even though I complain, after having my breasts for the last seven years, I've gotten used to them. I'm not happy about them, but they're here. The extreme embarrassment that I once felt has died down to annoyance. Still, the shame isn't totally gone. It pops up on occasion. But I know my bustline isn't going anywhere, even though I wish the comments would.

Discussion prompts: First, offer up some general questions based on their reactions during the reading. For example you can say, "I heard some laughter. Who thinks this story is funny? What parts are funny? What is the funniest part?" Or if you sensed some students were nodding in agreement ask what parts of the story made them nod. Did any parts of the story remind them of incidents that happened to them, for example, have they ever been teased by boys about their breasts or have they ever thought about trying to enhance (or reduce) their breasts? Did any of them find the story offensive?

Then you can ask questions more specifically tied to the story. Here are some suggestions:

- How many different names did Andrea use to describe her breasts? What are some of them? Which ones are funny or offensive or just trite? Why do you think she used so many names? Did she leave any terms out? Did using these terms make you feel more comfortable with the topic?

- Where in the story does she suggest why she wanted larger breasts? (Note: In the fifth paragraph of the first column she mentions that in junior high she noticed everyone had "cleavage" so peer pressure is a cause; in the sixth paragraph of the first column she says "the media always publicized and encouraged" large breasts. In the last column she describe boys teasing her about her chest.) Do your students experience the same pressures and influences?

- At the end of the story she notes that "skinny girls are in now" so her small dimensions are in style. Do your students agree with her assessment of current fashion? Is it any better for the media to be stressing the beauty of runway models than promoting the desirability of having larger breasts?

- Where in the story does she describe why her breast obsession began to dwindle? (Note: The last column describes her boyfriend's acceptance of her "as is.")

Writing Idea

Tell students that everyone has something about themselves they do not like. Too tall. Too short. Too fat. Too thin. Hair too curly. Hair too straight. And we all tend to magnify (and sometimes obsess about) things that other people may hardly notice or care about. For example, how many of us overlook acne on someone else's face, but are horrified by pimple on our own?)

Assuming you have had students read and discuss Andrea's story, make copies of Rasheeda Raji's story on the previous page and ask them to read it for homework. Then have them write a short opinion essay on this topic. They can take either side of the issue, but they must choose one side or the other.

Debate Idea

Side 1: Everyone has physical "defects" that bother them, but we just have to learn to live with them. In fact, learning to accept ourselves (and be accepted by others) for who we are, with all our imperfections, is just part of growing up.

Side 2: In today's day and age, there's no reason to settle for physical imperfections. A little cosmetic surgery would solve Andrea and Rasheeda's problems.

You could prompt students a bit. For example, for the student who argue that a little cosmetic surgery would solve the problem, ask them "Where would it end?" Breasts, nose, eyelids, liposuction...there's no end to ways we could "improve" ourselves. For students who argue that you should just "accept" your body, what about people who have disfiguring accidents...is cosmetic surgery OK then?

Follow-up Debate: Pick the writers of the two best essays and have them debate the issue before the class. Then have another discussion in which all the students can participate.



Abraham Colón

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Dad

Portraits of Our Fathers (Writing Lesson: Description of a Person)

Goals:

- Help your students understand the elements of a good personal profile.
- Help your students write short profiles of an adult who is important to them.
- Reading and comparing the profiles will give your students tips on how to start a profile, how to work anecdotes and dialogue into the profile, and how to end an essay with a with a point of view or summary opinion.

Stories to use: "Portraits of Our Fathers" on pages 12 and 13. Six writers contributed short profiles of their fathers.

Before reading the stories, write the following on the board:

- 1) What moment or time of life does the teen write about?
- 2) What event or scenes do they describe?
- 3) What emotions are expressed in the story?
- 4) What do we learn about the father's personality?
- 5) Where does the teen use dialogue?
- 6) Where does the teen offer an opinion?

Also write on the board:
Beginning
Middle
End

Tell your class that they are going to read six short descriptions of fathers written by teenagers. As they read then stories, tell the students you want them to notice certain things (the items you've listed on the board).

Reading the stories: The average reader can read each of these vignettes in 2-3 minutes. Consider reading some of the stories aloud (you could read them or have students take turns), and reading some silently.

During one of the stories you read aloud, pause from time to time and ask students to notice the answers the questions you wrote on the board, such as the emotions in the story, or use of dialogue.

For example if you read Igor Mestechkin's "Skating With Pop" you can point out the following ways Igor developed his story:

- 1) **Part of life chosen to write about:** Skating
- 2) **Events described/situation described** Detailed descriptions of skating with dad, Father leaving, Igor and mom struggling
- 3) **Emotions expressed** Love of skating and bonding with dad
Betrayal when dad leaves
Gratitude for skating experience

4) Personality/traits of the father conveyed

Loving dad spending lots of time with son
Sick dad who leaves family

5) Dialogue recalled

Igor's offer to care for his father

6) Opinions offered

Skating with dad was the best part of his life

After you finish reading the story point out how Igor structured the story chronologically, and point out that writing about things in the order they happened is usually a good way to proceed.

Discussion: After the class has read all the stories try to get them to think comparatively about the pieces using the six elements above and the beginning, middle and end phases. Here are some discussion prompts to get students thinking about how various elements can be used in a story.

1) Which two stories do not begin with memories of a specific incident from the past? (These are also the two stories with no dialogue.)

2) How many stories involved eating and/or cooking?

3) How many stories begin with a very dramatic or unusual experience? (None of them do, and that's an important point. Students often feel that nothing in their life is worth writing about. Emphasize that one of the best ways to describe a relationship is to focus on an ordinary experience, like skating, and to show why it was important.

Writing Lesson

Tell students to pick an adult in their lives who is important to them. Explain that it will help if they have at least one strong emotion about the person: love, hate, gratitude, longing. For example, Patricia Rogers feels gratitude toward her father, and in her short essay she explains that he is always there for her. Gamal Jones

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.

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feels love, and it's based on his father's cooking. Lily Mai feels loneliness, and she describes a distant father. Tanisia Morris feels comfort, and describes riding around in the car listening to music together.

Tell students to: 1) Pick a person to write about. 2) Write an important emotion connected with that person. 3) Describe an experience they've had with the person that shows the emotion and conveys the personality of the person. (They can add dialogue, opinions, and other elements to the story as they see fit.)

Peer editing option: Consider having students read each other's first drafts and make comments on them. Break the students up into groups of 4. Tell them they are going to



exchange papers and give each other written feedback. Give them about 5 minutes to read and respond. Students must restrict their comments to two things (you can write these on the board, or hand them out in a worksheet):

1) They tell the writer one thing you like about the draft.

2) Point out one place in the draft where you would like more information or description and why.

After the first group exchanges, students should switch partners and exchange with someone else in their group. Each student gets feedback from two peers.

Then tell students to write a second draft based on the feedback they got. They should hand in their first draft, their second draft, and the comments of their peers. (Tell them their grade will be based on three things: the overall quality of their essay, the improvement between the first and second drafts, and the quality of their comments for their peers.)

Absent Fathers/ Forgiveness

"Out of Prison and Into My Life," by Dorena Belovet Ruff, p. 16.

Discussion prompts

In many classrooms, the majority of the students do not have fathers at home. We've learned that teens actually think a lot about not having fathers around, but it's such a sensitive topic they rarely talk about it. Dorena's story, which is filled with mixed emotions, is a good prompt for talking about absent fathers. (And because she eventually reunites with her father, it can also be used to talk about what students want from their fathers.) Here some activities and discussion questions.

* Have students circle every place in the story where Dorena expresses anger toward her father. (There are at least six on page 16.) Read them aloud. Then ask: Why is she so angry at him? Is her anger justified? [This discussion can help validate students' deep feelings of anger toward absent fathers.]

* Dorena's mother tells her that her father is dead. She only finds out that he is in prison when she is 12. Was it right to keep that information from Dorena? Did it protect her in some way? Harm her? Or does it not matter? Why?

* Ask students to identify the point in the story where Dorena's opinion of her father changes. (Third column on page 16, next to last paragraph.) What does he do? Would your students have responded in the same way? Why or why not?

* By his own actions, Dorena's dad removed himself from her life for 16 years. Some people would say that's unforgivable,

yet she forgives him (top of 4th column, p. 17). What actions did he take to earn her forgiveness? Do students think it was hard for her to forgive him? Why?

* Dorena's mother did almost all the work of raising her, yet she and Dorena don't get along. How do you think she feels about Dorena's relationship with her father?

Writing idea

Have students write a letter to Dorena telling her what stood out for them in her story and why. (Send copies to us and we'll forward them to Dorena.) Keeping the topic wide open ("What stood out for you?") will encourage students to write about a part of the story that touched them, and help them think about their own relationships to their fathers (or their mothers).