



# Tips for Teachers

A Guide for Using *New Youth Connections* in Schools and After-School Programs

November 2008

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what strategy might the father use to get the author's attention and help the author enter his world? What tone might he use? Would he talk to the author like a bully, or would he go all soft? What does he want from the author, other than understanding and compassion? What can he offer to the author? How can he repair the damage he has already done?)

**Regents Connection:** This idea of seeing through another's eyes bears close relation to Task 4 on the Regents English Exam, the "critical lens." Here's how you can adapt it: Tell students to look at the last line: "Maybe when I'm an adult I'll understand his logic, but right now I can't."

Ask students to think about where in the books they've been reading can they find examples of a character not being able to understand another character. What has resulted from the frustration? Students can discuss this as a group. Or, you can assign them to identify two books and write several paragraphs about each book and the significance of one character's failure or inability to understand another character's point of view.

### Graphing Life's Journey "Picking Myself Up," by Anita Ames, p. 6

#### Graphing Activity; Autobiographical Writing Activity

**1. Graph Anita's life:** Anita struggles before she finally reaches her goal. Frederick Douglass said, "Without struggle there can be no progress." How many people in your class have struggled before reaching a goal, any goal? Take an informal survey. How would success be different if there were no struggle? Would it still be success?

Tell your students that they're going to create a graph of Anita's path to success. Then they will graph their own journey. This will allow everyone to actually SEE a life, to visualize turning points, and to get



a sense of which turning points are more dramatic than others. Afterwards, prepared with an outline, they will write their own life stories, ready to pay close attention to every twist and turn, and take time to fully dramatize the most drastic shifts. They will hook readers into the drama of their lives.

Draw two intersecting axes on the board, like the graph on page 2. Label the x-axis "Time," and the y-axis "Positive" (going up) and "Negative" (going down).

## Understanding Point of View

"Man of the House," by Anonymous, p. 3

### Writing Activity; Literature Analysis

**1. Read the story aloud together,** so that each student has a chance to share the author's voice and point of view, and give the students a chance to brainstorm on the frustrations the author experiences. Ask students if they can relate to his frustrations, even if they have no experience with these conditions. Do they feel why he would punch the walls? Do they understand? When have they experienced similar feelings?

**2. Reread the last two paragraphs:** In the next-to-last paragraph he describes his father's own frustrations, and his attempt to see things through his father's eyes. The last paragraph explains that he can't understand or forgive him, even though he wants to.

**3. Have students write a letter from the father to his son,** explaining his "logic." Describe the same events, but through the father's eyes.

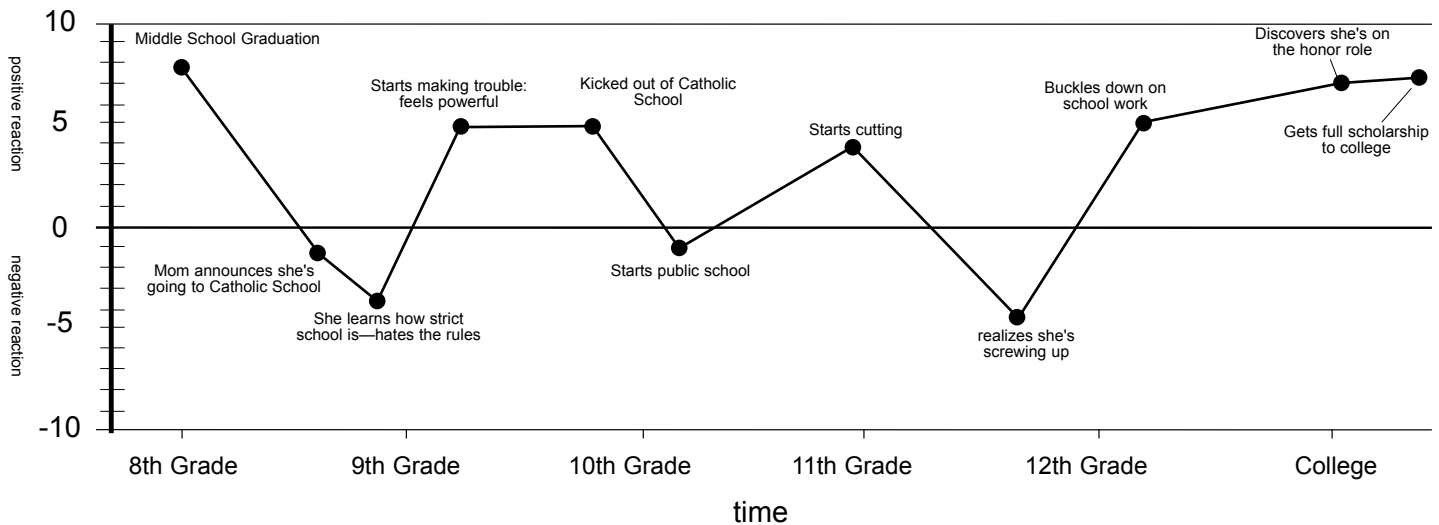
(Before students start on their essays, ask them: Knowing how frustrated the author is, and how frustrated the father is,

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For more information, contact:  
**Youth Communication**  
224 W. 29th St., 2nd fl.,  
New York, NY 10001  
212-279-0708 ext.100  
youthcomm.org

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# Anita's Life



Number the Positive and Negative scales from 1-10.

Tell students they are to read Anita's story to themselves. For each major event in the story they are to place a dot on the graph. Show them how to do the first dot. In the first paragraph she is graduating from middle school, and says that, "Nothing was greater than the feeling of graduation." Thus, this event should go first on the timeline (closest to the y-axis), and it should be very high on the positive scale (let each student decide how high, but it's clearly at least a 7). If students can't see that, remind them that the ranking is based on how Anita felt *then*, not on how she might feel about it now. It's an "in the moment" ranking.

Shortly after the graduation, Anita's mother announces that Anita's going to a private school. Anita's unhappy about this, but she goes along. Where does

that rank? Negative one? Positive one? Discuss the possibilities. Tell students they have to decide, and have a reason for their decision.

Have students continue reading on their own (or in small groups if you prefer to have them doing groupwork.). They should place dots and label each one with name of the event.

When most of the students are done, have a conversation based on the graph they have created. What stands out for them? Is anything surprising? Where's the biggest gap between dots? What would they say is the most important change, or turning point? Why?

## 2. Students graph their own lives:

Having completed Anita's graph, ask your students to make graphs of their own lives. They can choose between graphing their entire lives so far, or a more recent segment, such as this school year, or high

school so far, or a relationship. They're to follow the example you modeled as a group.

After graphing their own lives, ask your students to reflect on their work with the same questions used above—Surprises? Biggest jump? Most important turning point? Have them write these reflections briefly.

**3. Students write a brief autobiography:** Prepared with a graph and interpretive notes, ask students to write an essay about the time they've graphed, explaining and interpreting the events as if they're historians or biographers or scientists, trying to "solve" the mystery of themselves.

**[Regents Connection:** This activity prepares students for Task 2 of the English Regents Exam, by having them create and then analyze graphs.]

## To Be Happy or Successful (Is it Possible to Be Both?)

"Rewriting My Dream," by Marsha Dupiton, p. 10

### Letter Writing Activity

**1. Prewriting activity:** Before reading the story, write two words on the board: "Happiness" and "Success," spaced widely apart. Ask the students to call out any words they associate with happiness. Then do the same for success. When finished, stand back and reflect together. What do we see? Any patterns? Do any words appear with both words? Which ones? What does that tell us? Ask the group to come up with a definition of "happiness" and "success," based on all the words gathered around them on the board. It should be one sentence. Write it on the

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board when they've come up with it.

**2. Read the story & discuss:** Once you have some consensus, read the story aloud, taking turns often so lots of students get to speak in Marsha's voice.

Ask the class if they think the author is happy. Her family supports her, but she feels pressure from them to find a stable career, and journalism feels unstable. Do any of your students experience similar pressures?

Ask the students: In choosing a career, what is more important, what you love? Or what your family wants you to do? Some of each? In what ratio?

**3. Brainstorm:** Tell the students they are going to write a letter to Marsha, but first they are going to brainstorm. Who supports them? In what ways? In what ways are they missing support that they want or need? Is there any way they can begin trying to get that support? How does Marsha's story make them feel? Inspired? Jealous? Brave? Lost? Why? What do your students want to do for a career? What do they love to do? Why? If they don't know yet, then what are some possibilities?

**4. Write a letter to Marsha:** After briefly brainstorming on paper in response to these questions, they're ready to write a letter. Do they want Marsha's advice? Do they want to give her advice? Do they want to share a similar story from their lives? Do they want to show how different their lives are? (The letters can be anonymous.)

## Exploring Metaphors and Similes

"My Family Across the Ocean," by

Anonymous, p. 14

### Poem Writing Activity

**1. Discussion.** Define "metaphor" on the board. One possible definition is, "Putting together two unlike things, in order to say something about one of them. Example: "My heart is a storm" suggests that something powerful and out of control is happening in my heart, strong emotions. A "simile" is a metaphor with the word "like" or "as" inserted. Example: "My heart is like a storm."

**2. Read the story/metaphor hunt:** Tell the class to search this article for metaphors and similes while reading it—and circle them.

**3. Share discoveries:** Share out what the students have found. For each find, ask students why they think the writer combined these two things. How does it make you feel? Why does the writer want you to feel that way? How does it help her

tell her story and make her big point (and, ultimately, what might be her big point?)? Example: In the first paragraph, when she says, "My feet were frozen inside my sneakers," what is the author suggesting? Are her feet really frozen? Likewise, in the third paragraph, "my tears came down like broken strings that kept falling apart" says what about her emotions, apart from that she's sad?

Which of the writer's metaphors or similes stands out for your students? Why?

**4. Write a metaphor poem:** Now, each student will write an "extended metaphor poem." They can choose themselves as subject, or someone else (but no one who might be upset by the poem, no matter how well-intended). The opening line goes like this:

"I am a lion" (The writer states the metaphor.)

Then, the writer "unpacks" the metaphor, line by line, "explaining" how she is a lion, then ending by asserting the metaphor again. Save the most touching or surprising line for last. For example:

I am a lion.  
I don't talk, I roar.  
When I eat, I devour my food, without chewing, and I eat three big helpings.  
I am not afraid of anyone.  
I find my own food.  
I wrestle with little lions, for fun.  
People are scared of me. When I walk by, they move away, like zebras.  
I have a heart bigger than a basketball.  
I am a lion.

Students can then read their poems aloud, and mount them on a poster board with illustrations, to make a display in the hallway or room, something literate and personal.

**[Regents Connection:** This links to Task 3, which asks students to identify and comment on the use of literary elements, and which almost always asks for study of a poem.]

## Do Parents Need to Trust Their Children More?

"Her Shining Star?" by Tashiana

Garrido, p. 22

### Debate Activity—For Classroom or After School

Note: This activity can take up to an hour. You can divide it into two sections over two days: the pre-debate prep and

then the debate.

**1. Introduce the lesson.** Tell the group that they are going to read a story by a young woman who rebelled against her mother's rules and what happened after her mother found out about her disobedience. After reading, the group will divide into two smaller groups and debate each other around the statement: "Resolved: Parents Need to Trust Their Children More."

**2. Parents' rules.** To get them in the mood to read the story, ask them to write down on a piece of paper one of their parent's rules they hate and one they think makes sense. Don't put their names on the papers.

**3. Arbitrarily break the group into two teams.** (Or, you could have several teams, e.g., two teams of four youth that will argue one side, and two teams that will argue the other side. Smaller teams may be more manageable). Remind them that in debate competitions, you argue the side you are assigned. Each member should have their piece of paper with their comments on their rules at home. There is a positive team (agreeing with the resolution) and the negative team (arguing against and that "Parents Need to be More Strict").

**4. Each team reads the article and prepares their case:** Pick a captain for each team to write down the group's comments about the story. Tell them they have 15 minutes to scour the article for evidence that supports their side. Tell them to underline or circle the evidence, so they can return to it easily. The captain takes notes of the comments during this phase.

After they read the article tell the captain to collect the notes they made about their own house rules. The captain reads them out loud and asks for comments from the group that would support their position. He or she should take notes. This should take 10 minutes.

**5. Opening statements:** Appoint two people on each side to give opening statements based on the story and on their personal experiences with parental rules. Each side has 3 minutes for the opening statement. The other side should be taking notes so they can rebut.

**6. Rebuttal:** After the opening round, each side has 5 minutes to come up with a response or rebuttal to the other side's argument. Then each side has 3 minutes to present their responses.

**7. Conclusion (writing):** Have the students write a two-paragraph reflection

on the issue. The first paragraph should state their position and cite two or three pieces of evidence from the article. The second paragraph should present evidence from their experiences and from what they heard during the debate. The second paragraph should open with a transition sentence, for example, "My own life also supports this position."

## Letter Writing Activity for "Her Shining Star?"

General: Tell students that writing a letter involves taking a "stance" or a having a "point of view" about the article. Here are typical stances about "Her Shining Star?"

—Write a letter to Tashiana sympathizing with her for living with a strict mother.

—Write a letter criticizing her for how she disobeyed her mother.

—Write a letter to Tashiana that compares something in the story with their experiences.

—Alternative: Write a letter to the mother praising her for keeping Tashiana out of trouble or criticizing her for not giving her more freedoms and responsibilities.

### Writing Contest #191—Win \$150!

Deadline: Nov. 17.

**Question #191:** What do you think about the pregnancy of 17-year-old Bristol Palin (daughter of Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin)?

**1. Brainstorm:** Everyone, including you, make a list on paper of every word or phrase or person or experience that comes to mind when you think of teenage pregnancy. Model this briefly by starting a list or web on the board. Write down a few words that come to your mind ("condoms," "loneliness," "difficult choices"...). Let everyone continue for about a minute, then have volunteers share results, and you write them on the board. Having the words on the board will supplement individual lists, and may spark new ideas.

**2. Read the contest question aloud.**

**3. Distribute a handout** with the three prompts that accompany the question (or direct students to read them in the magazine). Have students read them aloud.

**4. Discussion:** Lead a brief discussion in which students respond to any of the prompts that stand out for them. (Controversy and disagreement are fine. In fact, they can help spur strong essays.)

**5. Read aloud the essays on page 24:** Let a different student in your class read each short essay.

**6. Write an essay to enter in the contest.** Tell students they can use the brainstorming, respond to the prompts or to the class discussion, or to the essays on page 24.

### Writing Contest #192—Win \$150

Deadline: Jan. 5

**Question #192:** What's the furthest you've ever gone for a friend?

**1. Brainstorming:** On the board, write the word "friend." Ask your stu-

dents to brainstorm by writing as many words and phrases, descriptions, memories, feelings, etc. as they can in one minute, all in response to hearing the word "friend." Then share out loud, and write responses on the board. Ask the students to look at the board. Do they notice any patterns? Do any groups of words belong together? Does there seem to be some agreement on the nature of friendship?

**2. Read the contest question aloud.**

**3. Freewrite to develop anecdotes:** Encourage your students to write answers to these questions. (One good way to get them writing is to read the questions aloud as a freewrite, in which each student writes quickly and privately for 60-90 seconds, stream-of-consciousness, in response to the prompt.)

Their answers will be the raw material for building their essays. The more specific their answers the better. For each of the above questions, ask your students to tell a brief story, to illustrate what they're saying. In discussing sacrifice, for example, can they recall a time when they made a specific sacrifice, or refused to make one? Encourage them to tell that story, which will become the heart of their entry.

- Read these questions aloud, giving 60 seconds for students to freewrite answers to each one. What's your definition of "friend"? Start with, "A friend is...." Keep writing, "A friend is..." as many times as you can, each time giving one more answer.

- Think of a friend who has helped you. What, specifically did the friend say or do? Do they expect the same in return? Do you expect that you and your friends would always do the same things for each other? Why, or why not?

- How important is sacrifice in friendship? Why? Briefly describe a time a friend went out of their way for you. Describe a time you went out of your way for a friend.

- How far is too far to go for a friend? What's an example of a sacrifice you would not make for a friend? Would you make that sacrifice for family? Why?

#### 4. The Hook

When students have finished brainstorming (or responding to the freewrite) it's time to talk about assembling all the pieces. Ask them to take a look at the opening line of last month's contest winner (p. 18). How does Angela get your attention right away? How does she make you want to continue reading? No explanation precedes the opening words. It feels like we've been dropped into the middle of a situation we know very little about. But we want to know more: What happened to cause her regret?

Tell the students to look through their notes for the most interesting and most vivid element of their story—an event, a person, a conversation—that will get the reader's attention and make the reader want to know more, to keep reading.

#### 5. Snapshots (bring the anecdotes to life)

Ask the students to volunteer images from their brainstorming. Make sure they know that images can be made from any combination of the five senses. Elicit the list of senses. Point out that Angela's opening created an "auditory image," a picture made from sound.

When the writers are all ready with an image, ask them to describe it in detail, to make sure we can all see it exactly as they see it. ("I can smell spaghetti sauce, and I can see late afternoon sunlight slanting onto the kitchen table. Outside, the sound of birds chirping. Mom is standing in front of the stove in her apron, stirring the sauce.")

#### 6. Win this Contest! (appeal to the judges)

Remind your students that fellow teens read and judge all the entries. Their essays need to appeal to people just like them (not to teachers, for example).