



Tips for Teachers

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

September/October 2001

THIS ISSUE'S THEME: FRIENDS

In this issue of NYC, our writers examine friendship from several perspectives. We see the close bonds between a father and son, and between Chinese-American youth who share a common language and culture. Friends help Sonia Nunez deal with depression, while the death of a peer forever alters Winnie Tang's outlook on life. And two other stories show that when people change, friendship doesn't always survive. Use these stories to help your students explore the importance of friendship in their own lives.

When a Friend Changes, a Friendship Ends

In "Drifting Apart," p. 3, the anonymous writer is best friends with Steven in elementary

school, but they start drifting apart in junior high when Steven gets teased for being nerdy. The writer encourages Steven to make an effort to fit in, but when Steven starts doing drugs to be popular, the writer regrets he ever tried to change him.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Have you been in a situation similar to the writer's, where you had a close friendship that began to come apart? What did you try to do to save it? What eventually happened? Looking back, would you have tried something different? Why or why not?

—The writer encouraged Steven to change in order to be more popular with the other kids. Did the writer do the right thing? Why or why not?

—If you were the writer, would you have encouraged Steven to change? Why or why not?

—If you were Steven's friend, and he began to do drugs, what would you have done?

—Is it better to be popular, or to be your own person? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

—The writer says he learned "that you shouldn't try to change people, even if you think it will help them." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

—Was the writer really responsible for the changes in the friend? Or do you think the friend might be decided to join a different crowd and do drugs for his own reasons?

Roleplay

Two students, playing the writer and Steven. The writer wants Steven to stop doing drugs and go back to his old self. Steven says he's just trying to be popular, which is what the writer encouraged him to do in the first place.



A Quick Way to Get Everyone Writing

Letters to the Editor: Remind readers that we welcome letters to the editor and publish many of them (see p. 25, where readers write about cheating and using the "n-word"). This is an easy way to involve everyone in a short writing assignment (and they may get the satisfaction of seeing their opinions 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..."

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 addition, role plays and group exercises are sometimes suggested for more active learning experiences.

A note on the role plays

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

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.

Dear Old Dad

In “My Father, My Friend,” p. 5, Macario DeLaCruz describes his close relationship with his father. People often mistake them for friends rather than father and son, but they’re not really mistaken: the two share many interests and value their time together.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Macario describes his father as his “double”—someone who has almost the same personality, temperament, and interests. Do you have a “double” in your life? Who is this person, what interests do you share, and how does the friendship help you?

—Macario says he and his father get along “even though we don’t live together.” Do you think they would get along as well if they lived together? Why or why not?

—Macario and his father share many interests—such as video games and music. Do you think it’s possible to be close to someone who doesn’t share common interests? Why or why not?

—Write a short letter to Macario, telling him why you can (or can’t) relate to his story.

Roleplay

Two students, playing Macario and a friend. Macario’s friend doesn’t believe that adults—and especially parents—can relate to young people. Macario believes they can and uses the example of his father.

Dealing with a Friend’s Death—in Good and Bad Ways

In “Life After Death,” p. 8, Winnie Tang talks about how the murder of a young acquaintance changed her attitude toward life. Death once seemed a far away thing that happened to other people, but now Winnie values living in the moment much more than before. In “Our Rage Turned into Racism,” p. 8, she describes how some of her friends reacted in a negative way, blaming all Black people for what one Black person—the murderer—did.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Have you ever experienced the death of a friend or loved one? If so, how were your reactions similar to Winnie’s? How were they different?



—While Victor’s death was a terrible thing, some good came out of it—Winnie learned to appreciate life to the fullest. Has a negative experience in your past ever resulted in something positive? What was the experience, and what good came out of it?

—What does Winnie do to help Alex feel better? Should she have done more? If so, what? What would you have done to help Alex with his loss?

—Some of Winnie’s friends blamed all Black people for Victor’s death. Have you ever been in a similar situation or had similar feelings, where you blamed a whole group of people for what one person did? Do you still have those feelings? Why or why not?

Roleplay

Two students, playing Winnie and a friend. The friend blames all Black people for Victor’s death. Winnie wants her friend to know why that is the wrong attitude to take.

Were We Too Different?

Sharon Feder, in “My So-Called Friends,” p. 12, describes becoming very close to a group of friends when she starts high school. But over time, the things she dislikes about them become impossible to ignore. When she confronts one of the guys about his hostile behavior, the whole group deserts her. Sharon realizes she tried to fit in with people who were too different.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—When Sharon first notices negative things about her friends, she doesn’t do or say anything. Was this the right approach for her to take? Would you have done the same thing? Why or why not?

—Why do you think Sharon stayed friends with the group, even though she didn’t like many things about them? Would you have

stayed in? Why or why not?

—Have you ever been in a similar situation, where you overlooked things you didn’t like about your friends? What eventually happened?

—Instead of saying nothing to her friends until Mike hurt her, is there a way Sharon could have spoken up sooner, and still preserved her friendship? How?

—In most friendships, are there negative things you have to overlook? How do you deal with that issue in your own friendships?

Roleplay

Two students. Student A believes that the key to a good friendship is avoiding or glossing over certain topics that might threaten it. Student B thinks wants to convince Student A the key to friendship is total honesty.

Help with Overcoming Depression

On p. 22, Sonia Nunez describes how her friends help her fight against depression (“Friends Keep Me Going”). She feels uncomfortable and hides her feelings around most people, but with her friends she can forget her sadness, relax, and even smile.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Each of Sonia’s friends supports her in a different way. List your friends and describe how each supports you and why you have a close friendship.

—Write a letter to a friend, explaining how that person has helped you.

—In what ways would you like to improve your friendships? What steps could you take to do that?





—Sonia says her friends are sometimes judged by how they look on the outside (they dress baggy and talk slang) rather than by who they are on the inside. Are there ways that you and your friends are judged by how you look and talk, rather than by who you are? How? What impact does this have on you and your friends?

Roleplay

Two students, playing Sonia and a friend. Sonia's friend feels depressed and thinks no one cares. Sonia tries to support her friend by pointing out the positive things in her life.

Sharing a Common Culture

In "Secret Words," p. 23, Winnie Tang, who is Chinese, describes how language binds her with her friends. By speaking a mixture of Cantonese and English, they've adapted to American culture while preserving their Asian heritage.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Winnie considers herself both Chinese and American. In what ways do you see yourself as part of two (or more) cultures? (e.g. from two different countries; or part of two different lifestyles, such as metalhead and jock). Which culture do you relate to most strongly? Why?

—Through language, Winnie and her friends share a special bond. In what ways do you and your friends use language to connect with each other? (It may be slang, a foreign language, or expressions only your friends use.) Write a letter to a friend in the language you use with each other, or highlighting the slang or special words you use.

Role play: two students. Student A thinks that people from other cultures or countries should assimilate as quickly as possible (mas-

ter English, eat hamburgers, root for the Yankees, etc.). Student B wants to convince Student A that it's better to be "bi-cultural," (e.g., stay fluent in your native language, etc.).

OTHER STORIES IN THIS ISSUE

Anyone Could Become Homeless

In "Calling a Shelter Home," p. 6, Lindsay Chabra describes living in a homeless shelter with her mother. They have their own apartment in the shelter, but losing the home they had for 13 years (along with their cats) was a traumatic experience that Lindsay won't soon forget. In sidebars (pps. 6 and 7), Lindsay looks at the rise in homeless families in New York City and interviews teens who live in her shelter.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—What part of Lindsay's story do you relate to the most? Why?

—What part of Lindsay's story makes you the most angry? Why?

—Have you or anyone you know ever been homeless? What eventually happened to this person?

—List all the things that come to mind when you think of homeless people. Now, how many of those things are true about Lindsay and her family? How many are not true?

—Has Lindsay's story changed your view of homeless people? Why or why not?

Roleplay

Two students, playing Lindsay and a

classmate at her school. The classmate thinks most homeless people are either crazy or choose to be homeless. Lindsay wants her friend to know the truth about homeless people.

Group activity

Students can work in pairs or small groups. In addition to Lindsay's main article, have the class read "More Homeless Families Than Ever in NYC" on p. 6. Tell each group that they are part of a new mayoral administration in New York City, and must come up with a policy for reducing or eliminating homelessness in the city. Go around the room, list the suggestions on the board, and discuss.

The GED Option

In "GED vs. Diploma", p. 14, Macario DeLaCruz describes the pros and cons of getting a GED (General Educational Development) diploma. A sidebar gives background on the GED and describes how to get more information.



Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—According to the article, what are the advantages of getting a GED? What are the disadvantages?

—Would you ever consider getting a GED instead of a regular high school diploma? Under what circumstances would you consider it?

—Have you ever thought about dropping

Writing contest, p. 3:

Encourage students to enter our writing contest, which offers \$175 in prizes:

"If You Could Have a Super Power, What Would It Be and Why?"

You may want to devote part of your class to discussing the topic, before turning to the writing.

Deadline Oct. 5

out of school? What kept you from doing it?

—What are your educational goals after high school?

Roleplay

Two students, playing Macario and his friend Zachary. Zachary has dropped out and isn't doing much with his life. Using the example of his parents, Macario wants Zachary to know why he should get his GED.

Roleplay

Two students. Student A wants to drop out and get his GED. Student B tries to convince Student A that it will be more valuable in the long run to stay in school and get a regular high school diploma.

The Spiral of Depression

Sonia Nunez, in "Overcome By Depression," p. 16, writes about her struggle to keep her head above feelings of worthlessness and despair. Seemingly small things trigger her downward spiral, and no one quite understands what she's going through. In "Five Days in a Mental Institution," p. 18, she describes being committed to a psychiatric center because of her depression, and how she was helped by the program. A short article on p. 19 ("When Sadness Goes On and On...") gives expert advice to teens on what they can do to fight depression.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Have you ever experienced depression? If so, how was it similar to Sonia's? How was it different?

—What do you think is the main cause of Sonia's depression?

—How does Sonia's family help her? How does her family contribute to her depression?

—Based on your own experience with sad feelings, give advice to Sonia in a short letter.

—Sonia says she felt better after being in the hospital. How do you think the hospital helped Sonia?

—If you were Sonia, what would you do to deal with your depression?

Roleplay

Two students, playing Sonia and her friend Carmen. Carmen thinks the depression is Sonia's fault—that she's just feeling sorry for herself and could get over it if she really wanted to. Sonia wants Carmen to know how painful

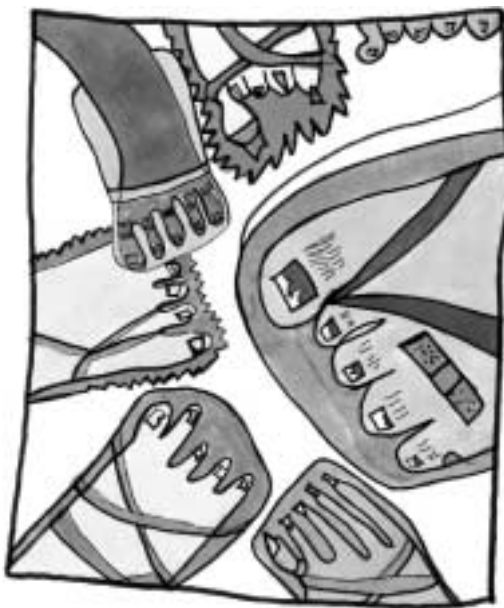
her depression is and that she can't control it.

Group activity

Students can work in pairs or small groups. Each group is to come up with a list of things that schools can do to better recognize depression in students and help them deal with it. Go around the room, list on the board, and discuss.

Foot Problems

Naomi Hopkins, in "Indecent Exposure," p. 26, describes the atrocious sights she sees when people's toes are bared by summer footwear.



Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Naomi and her mother disagree over whether Naomi should wear sandals. What fashion disagreements do you have with your

own parents? How do you resolve them?

—Naomi was ashamed to wear sandals but eventually became comfortable in wearing them. Do you wear something now that you were once afraid to wear? What made you change your mind?

—Naomi thinks people with ugly feet shouldn't wear sandals. Should they be forced to cover up? Should people with bad hair wear hats or scarves? Should people with thick thighs be banned from wearing shorts?

Not Quite 'Dem Bums,' But Not Bad Either

In "Major League Love for a Minor League Team," (p. 28), Sabine Maura writes about her passion for Brooklyn's new minor league team, the Cyclones, who play in Coney Island. A long-time Yankees fan, Sabine crosses the loyalty line to root for the farm team of the Mets. On p. 25, she describes her amazing luck in seeing a perfect game the first time she goes to Yankee Stadium ("The Perfect Game").

Prompts for discussion and/or writing

—Sabine is a Yankees fan, but goes to see the Mets farm team. Do you believe in 100% team loyalty? Or would you go to see a rival team if the opportunity presented itself?

—As Sabine points out, a lot of people go to minor league baseball because it's less expensive and commercialized. Do you feel major league sports have become too commercialized? If so, how? Has it affected your interest in sports? How?

Roleplay

Two students, playing Sabine and a friend. The friend thinks baseball is an incredible bore, "a nine-inning cure for insomnia." Sabine once felt that way, but wants her friend to know how interesting and exciting the game can be if you give it a chance.



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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