



# Tips for Teachers

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

September/October 2002

## Writing Contest— \$175 in Prizes

“If You Could Switch  
Places With Anyone,  
Who Would It Be  
And Why?”

Writing Contest, p. 2: Encourage your students to enter this month’s Writing Contest, which offers \$175 in prizes. You may want to devote part of your class to discussing this topic before turning to the writing.

**Deadline: October 7**

## 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 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.

## THIS ISSUE’S THEME:

# Showing Our True Colors

In this issue of *NYC*, several writers examine the difficulty of being true to one’s self. Whether it’s fitting in with friends, satisfying parental expectations, or finding the correct image, teens can have a hard time finding the right balance between doing what’s right for themselves and pleasing others.

## Sexuality and the Church

In “My Gay Priest,” p. 3, Russell Castro describes how he’s caught off guard when a favorite parish priest discloses he is gay. Despite the homophobic remarks of family and friends, Russell tries to keep an open mind about the situation.

## Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

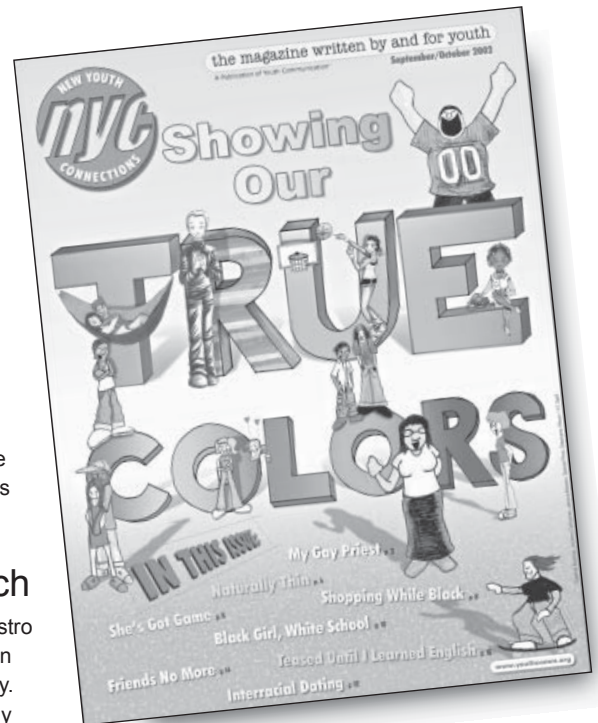
—Russell’s parents believe that gay priests are “traitors” to the church. Do you agree or disagree?

—When Russell’s friends find out that Father Jim is gay, they forget the good things he did for them. If you were in their shoes, what would have been your reaction to Father Jim after you found out he was gay?

—Russell is worried that if he sticks up for Father Jim, he’ll be labeled “gay.” Would you have stuck up for Father Jim? Why or why not? Have you ever been in a situation where you were afraid to stand up for someone, because of what others might think?

—Russell is not prejudiced toward gay people and is comfortable with them. Still, Father Jim’s revelation caught him off guard. Why do you think Russell had confused feelings?

—Why do so many people condemn gay



priests, when “God is supposed to love everyone, despite our differences”?

—Is sexual abuse in the Catholic Church reason to ban gay men from the priesthood? Why or why not?

—Father Jim helped Russell understand that questioning a religion’s beliefs was a good way of understanding a religion—that you could question the beliefs, and still be a believer. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

—Father Jim’s disclosure made Russell realize that he wasn’t as open-minded as he thought he was. Did a similar experience ever happen to you, where you realized you were “still prone to moments of ignorance”?

## Unwanted Attention

In “Naturally Thin,” p. 4, Desirée Guéry writes about the difficulties she encounters because she has a very thin physique. People assume she has an eating disorder, pester her to eat more, or make rude remarks, making it hard for her to be comfortable with who she is.

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[www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org)

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

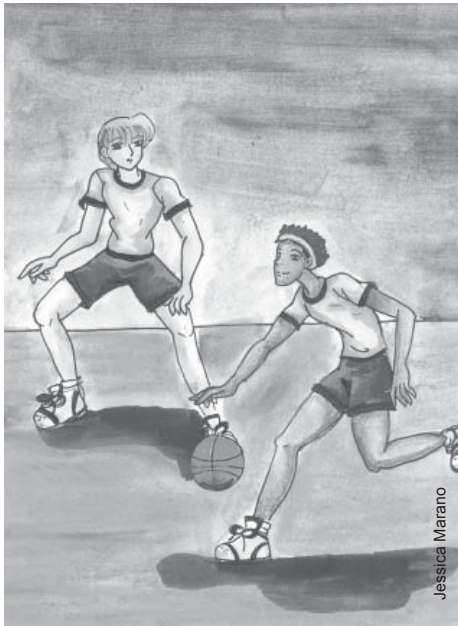
—Have you, like Desirée, ever been teased or been made to feel uncomfortable because of your physical appearance? In what ways?

—If Desirée was a very skinny boy, would she be treated differently? How?

—Does your family ever nag you about your eating habits, or think you should eat differently?

—At times, Desirée wears baggy clothes so she'll look bigger than she is. Have you ever changed the way you look, so that you'd fit in better with others? Do you still do it? Why or why not?

—If you were Desirée, how would you respond to the rude comments she gets?



### She Shoots... Yes!

In “She’s Got Game,” p. 6, Habiba focuses on the difficulty of being an athletic girl who loves basketball. Her parents don’t approve, thinking the sport is only appropriate for boys. Even after she joins the high school girls’ team, she feels self-conscious about playing.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Have you ever felt insecure about playing a sport, either for gender or other reasons?

—Habiba writes, “Society in general considers sports a guy’s activity.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?

—Habiba’s parents believe that some activities and behaviors are more appropriate for girls, and others are more appropriate for boys. Do your parents or friends have similar beliefs? What are they?

—When she plays on the girls’ team,

Habiba no longer has to worry about holding anything back. Have you ever felt a similar level of comfort, when you participated in a sport, activity, or class that was just for girls (or just for guys)? Why did you feel more comfortable?

—Habiba’s parents don’t like her to play basketball because of the “culture” associated with it. Is there something in your life your parents disapprove of, because of the “culture” they associate it with?

—Even after joining the girls’ team, Habiba still feels uncomfortable being a female athlete. Why do you think she still feels that way?

**Roleplay:** two students, playing Habiba and a friend (of either sex). The friend doesn’t think girls should play sports in general and basketball in particular. Habiba disagrees.

### Scoped in the Store

Amanda Nembhard, in “Shopping While Black,” p. 8, describes her anger when she’s watched or followed by store clerks who assume she’s a shoplifter. While Amanda feels there’s a racial element to this, it’s also part of being a teenager—she’s been followed by Black and Hispanic workers as well as by White ones. In an accompanying article on p. 9, “Stop, Thief!”, Lincoln Shann becomes addicted to stealing as a way to get attention and respect from his peers. He goes into the foster care system, and being a thief eventually loses its thrill as he finds more positive things to focus on.

### Amanda’s story—prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—When you shop, do you go through the same things that Amanda does?

—Do you think Amanda is checked out more because of her age or race? Why?

—Amanda doesn’t confront the workers



about their behavior because she doesn’t like confrontations. How would you respond to the workers?

—How could stores deal with the problem of shoplifters in a better way?

### Lincoln’s story: prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Lincoln steals because he likes the feeling of excitement he gets from it. He also likes the respect and attention he gets from friends. Did you ever steal? If so, did you do it for the same reasons as Lincoln, or for different reasons? If not, have you ever turned to a negative behavior to get attention? What was it? Were you able to give it up? Why or why not?

—Lincoln is in a peer support group that helps him, because the other kids get on his back about stealing. Has a similar group ever helped you with a problem? In what ways? If not, could you see such a group helping you? Why or why not?

—Gradually, stealing loses its thrill for Lincoln and becomes boring. Now he tries to get attention in more positive ways. Did you ever go through a similar change in your life? How?

### Black Prep Blues

In “Black Girl, White School,” p. 10, Angelina Darrisaw writes about her discomfort as one of the few Black students at an exclusive private school. She feels excluded by the White students, and singled out by teachers and the administration.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Until 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Angelina had little interaction with White people. Have you felt that isolated from another race or group of people? How did it affect your interactions with them?

—In her new school, Angelina feels out of place and excluded as the only Black girl. Have you ever felt out of place and excluded in a similar way, because of your race or for any other reason?

—Sometimes Angelina feels she has to represent “the entire Black race.” Have you ever been put in a similar situation?

—Because she’s a new student, the school assigns two Black students to talk to Angelina. But the school doesn’t assign people to talk to the new White students. Was this a good way for the school to welcome Angelina? If not, what would have been a better way?

—The other students have a lot of stereotypes about Angelina and Black people in general. Have you been stereotyped like that? How? Where do you think the stereotypes came from?

—Angelina wants to leave the school, but her mother refuses because the experience will

## A Quick Way to Get Everyone Writing:

**Letters to the Editor:** We welcome letters to the editor and publish most of them (see p. 22). 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...”



prepare her for “the real world.” Do you agree with the mother’s point of view? Why or why not?

—When Angelina and her Black friends sit together in the school cafeteria, they are told to break it up by the teachers and administration. Why do you think they were told that? Was it the right thing for the school to do?

## Friendship vs. Faith

In “Friends No More” and “Resisting My Religion,” p. 14, Florentina Abramov is the classic rebel, cutting school and shoplifting with her friends. But when she starts to closely follow Orthodox Jewish laws and customs, her friends abandon her.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

- Florentina goes from being a rebel to becoming a more religious person. Have you ever gone through a similar change?
- Florentina loses her friends when she becomes a more religious Jew. Did you ever lose a friendship because you changed something about yourself? What did you change, and why did the friendship end?

—Sometimes Florentina is tempted to give up her beliefs to regain her friends. Were you ever tempted to give up something you believed in or liked to do, so that you would fit in better with your friends? Did you go through with it? Why or why not?

—By writing in her journal and talking to friends, Florentina figures out the right thing to do for herself. What helps you to figure things out when you’re going through a difficult time?

## Adapting to America

In “Tongue-Tied,” p. 16, Amy Huang describes the challenges she encounters on coming to the U.S. from China at age 9. She’s teased by her Chinese-American classmates because she can’t speak English, and is later stressed out having to translate for her parents.

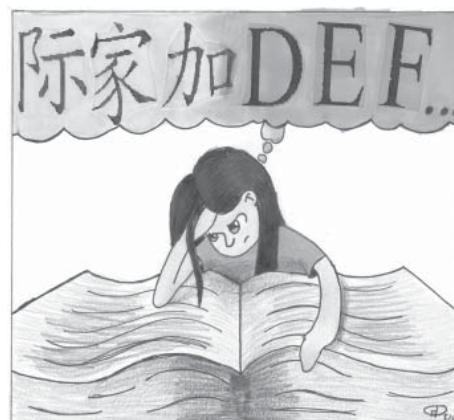
### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Did you ever feel distant from or rejected by others because you didn’t know English well? What eventually happened?

—Amy’s classmates are Chinese like her, but they still tease her. Why do you think they did that?

—Amy feels betrayed because people from her “own culture” turn against her. Have you ever been in a similar situation? Is it worse to be betrayed by someone from the same culture or background? Why or why not?

—Amy’s parents tell her to “stay away” from the kids who tease her. Amy thinks it’s useless advice. What would have been a better



thing for her parents to say or do, to help Amy deal with the teasing?

—Amy gets irritated having to translate for her non-English speaking parents. Are there things you have to do for your parents that are related to their inability to speak English well? How do you feel about doing them?

—Amy slowly becomes Americanized by “watching baseball and eating hamburgers and hot dogs.” How have you become Americanized? Or if you were born here, what is your reaction to Amy’s definition of “becoming Americanized”?



## Dating Dilemmas

Alice Wong, in “Love Has No Color,” p. 19, is caught in a bind: she wants to begin dating, but knows her parents and family won’t approve if she sees someone who’s not from the same culture and religion (her family is Burmese and Buddhist).

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Alice’s parents don’t want her to date someone from a different culture, ethnicity or religion. What are your parents’ attitudes toward dating? How do you respond to them?

—On the one hand, Alice wants the freedom to date whomever she wants. On the other hand, she doesn’t want to disrespect her parents’ wishes. How are you torn between pleasing yourself and pleasing your parents? In what ways have you reached a compromise with them? In what ways are you far apart?

—Have you dated someone outside your race, or from a different ethnic group or religion? What was it like? What kinds of problems, if any, did you encounter?

—Would you date someone your family disapproved of? Why or why not?

## Other Stories

### Secondhand Smoking

In "Stop the Smoke!", p. 5, Evelyn Gofman describes her disgust with cigarettes. She pleads with her father to quit, to no avail. But then the unthinkable happens—she ends up with a boyfriend who smokes.

#### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Do you smoke, or does anyone in your family smoke? What is your attitude toward smoking?

—When Evelyn, an anti-smoker, starts dating Roman, a smoker, it's like she's going against her standards and values. Did you ever date someone, or have a friendship with someone, whose behavior or values in a particular area were completely opposite from your own? What was the experience like?

—What facts about smoking did you learn from reading this article?



Jessica Marano

### Helping a Depressed Friend

In "Don't Hang Up!" on p. 12, Marianna Rybak befriends a teen in Texas via the internet. When the friend threatens suicide, Marianna goes to her aid.

#### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Have you ever helped a severely depressed or suicidal friend? What did you do?

—What is your reaction to the way Marianna helped Lisa? Would you have helped Lisa in the same way? Or would you have done different things?

—What helps when you're depressed? What do you want people to say or do? What shouldn't they say or do?

—Lisa feels that no one cares for her, and that people talk to her only out of pity. Have you ever felt that way? What eventually caused you to feel differently?



Stephanie Wilson

### What's the Big Deal?

In "Beauty or Beast," p. 26, Angelina Darrisaw describes her conflicted feelings about shaving bodily hair. She thinks it's a sexist double-standard, but she also conforms.

#### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Do you think women should have their bodily hair? Why or why not?

—Is there a double-standard for men and women when it comes to shaving?

—Angelina gets criticized by other girls when she doesn't shave. Have you ever been criticized by your peers because of your personal appearance, way of dressing, etc.? Did you change to fit in better with your peers? Why or why not?

—Is bodily hair on women a turnoff to you? Why or why not?

### I Really, Really Like You, But...

And in "All Talk, No Action," p. 28, Russell Castro focuses on the pros and cons of being a platonic male confidante to his female friends. He enjoys listening to their problems and getting insights into the female psyche, but sometimes he wishes he could be your typical hormonally-imbalanced sexist pig.

#### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Have you ever been in a situation similar to Russell's, where you were a platonic friend to someone you were interested in? What eventually happened?

—Russell has more female than male friends. Are most of your friends male or female? Why?

—Being friends with females has opened Russell's eyes to aspects of womanhood he didn't know about before. What have you learned about guys and/or girls from being friends with them?

—Is it easier to be friends with a guy or a girl?

—Russell says his female friends complain that men are only interested in sex. But then, he says, these same women value looks over personality when it comes to guys. Is this, in your experience, how women are?

—Would you, like Russell, be able to stay friends with someone that you wanted a physical relationship with? Why or why not?



Karolina Zamiesienko



**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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