



# Tips for Teachers

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

September/October 2003

## Writing Contest

This month's topic:

### "What would you do if you could make yourself invisible?"

Tell your students that an essay about sneaking into the girls' (or boys') locker room is not going to win. (This might be a chance to explain the concept of clichés to them.) Tell them that winning essays tend to have two qualities, a *strong main idea*, and *vivid details*. For example, the teen judges are likely to look favorably on a main idea that is funny or shows someone using their invisibility in an imaginative way, such as an essay about a student who sneaks into the Regents test scoring facility and raises all the grades on the Math A test to compensate for the bad test.

The details are also important. The judges want to know what the invisible person is seeing, hearing, feeling. Since we're seeing through the eyes of someone who is invisible, painting a vivid picture of what they see is especially important.

*Deadline is October 3, 2003*

**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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## Help Students Cope with Loss (and Better Understand the Losses in Their Lives)

Following is a lesson you can use to help students think about loss in their lives and to help you gauge the amount of loss they have suffered. It is based on "Our Loss," by Jordan Yue, p. 5

Teenagers suffer more losses than most adults are aware of. When classmates die (even ones they hardly know, as is the case in Jordan's story) it often has an important impact on them. Teens are also affected by the deaths of celebrities who are important to them, and by other losses, such as divorce or going into foster care.

While most teens work out their feelings on their own and with informal support from peers, you can use Jordan's story to help teens talk about some of their losses, and to do an informal assessment of the level of loss among your students. (For some teens who have unresolved feelings about serious losses like that of a parent or sibling, you may want to pay special attention to be sure they are getting the support they need.)

### Warm up—Loss Timeline (10-15 minutes)

Ask students to take out a sheet of paper and a pencil. They should turn the paper sideways, and draw a horizontal line right across the middle. They should put a dot at the left end and label it with their birth date, and a dot at the right end with today's date. Tell them that the space above the line represents happy feelings, and the space below the line represents sad feelings.

They should label dots on the line for times in their lives when they were especially happy or sad because people came into or left their lives. For example, if their favorite grandparent came to live with them in 1995, they'd draw a fairly tall line straight up from a dot



labeled 1995. If their parents got divorced and a parent moved out, they might draw a line down from that date. The longer the line, the more intense the feelings.

Tell them that the kinds of things they might record include: the births of brothers or sisters, parents marrying or divorcing, grandparents or other family members visiting or dying, a classmate's death, moving to a new neighborhood and losing old friends and gaining new ones, celebrity deaths, etc.—basically any time they had an important happy or sad emotion about a person coming or going in their life. Tell students they have to include at least five items on their timeline.

You should do a similar timeline on your own life, either while the students are doing theirs or before the class.

Tips for Teachers is also available on our web site at:  
[www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org)

### Brief Discussion (5 minutes)

Ask if anyone would like to talk about anything on their timeline. If no one volunteers, you can talk about something on yours. (If you model the sharing of your emotions, it will help students open up about their own.)

### Read the Story (15 minutes)

Have your students read the story. You can read it to them, or they can read it aloud as a group, or they can read silently. If you're reading aloud, feel free to let students make comments or initiate discussion, especially about Jordan's feelings or their own feelings.

### Discussion

Ask the students what stands out for them in Jordan's story. (E.g., Is it that so many people died? Ask them how many people died on their own timelines. Is it that he didn't know them well? Ask them if the death of someone they don't know well affects them, such as 9/11 victims, or Venus and Serena Williams' sister.

## Class of 2004



**Writing:** If you have time, or as a brief homework assignment, ask students to take one incident on their timeline and write a brief essay about it. The essay should include: Who came into or left their life? Why was (is) that person important to them? How did they feel at the time? How do they feel now? What advice would they have for someone else who is coping with that situation?

Collect the essays and timelines and read them carefully. They will give you important insights into the kinds of issues your students may be struggling with outside of class which will have an impact on their learning with you.

[Thanks to Martha Oates, author of *Death in the School Community*, and the staff of Forsyth Satellite Academy for the basic idea of this lesson.]

## Silver Linings: When Bad Experiences Turn Good

There are several stories in this issue in which bad experiences also have good effects. It can be especially hard when we're in the midst of a difficult experience to appreciate what we're gaining from it, but it is an important life lesson.

For a short story on this theme, see the winning writing contest, "Worst Camp, Coolest Brother," p. 18. For a longer story, see, "Foster Care Brought Out the Best in Me," p. 12.

### Discussion:

For either (or both) stories ask students: What were the disasters that befell the writers? (In the camp story, the writer discovers that the camp is "awful" in many respects, and he's stuck there. In the foster care story, after the writer is arrested, her mother abandons her to the system.)

Get students to volunteer as much detail as possible about the disasters (this encourages close reading, shows them how much good detail the writers have included). Then ask them to imagine themselves at one of the lowest moments in the story. Could they have imagined—at that point—that something good would come of the experience? Could they have acted in ways that would have prevented the good things that eventually came? For example, could the boys have run away from the camp, or the girl from the treatment center? What if the older brother had refused to hang out with his younger brother? What if the girl in foster care had refused to trust the staff, and just cursed them out? Ask who was the most help for each writer. (In each case it was another youth: the brother, and the friend in the treatment center.) Ask the class if they've had experiences where a peer helped them get through a rough spot.

### Writing assignment

Tell the class they have to remember a difficult experience they had which turned out to have a "silver lining" or from which they learned a valuable lesson. Depending on the writing abilities of your students, you can make this a general assignment or a highly structured 5-paragraph essay.

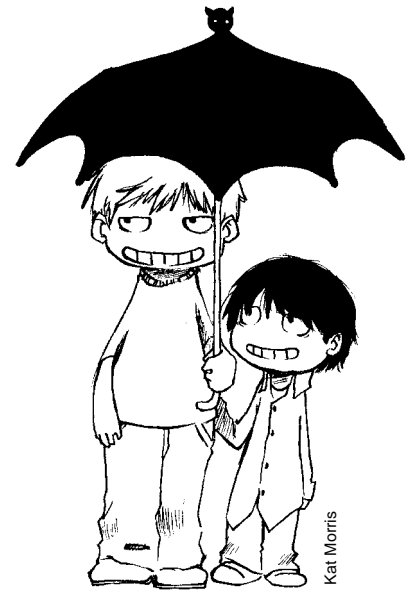
### General Essay

If you plan to assign a general essay—500-1,000 words—consider giving directions like these:

—Your essay should have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

—The beginning should set the scene: give us the background we need to know to understand how you fell into this disastrous situation.

—The middle should describe the situation, especially what happened that made it



such a disaster. You'll want to include lots of facts about what happened, and include the emotions you were feeling. Somewhere in the middle there will probably be an identifiable "turning point" where you began to realize that the cloud had a silver lining.

—The end should be a reflection on the experience. Looking back, how do you feel about it? Would you do it again, knowing what you know now? What would you have done differently? Etc.

### Five-Paragraph Essay

If you want to assign a tightly structured 5-paragraph essay, consider giving these instructions for each paragraph:

¶ 1. Introduce the idea that we can learn from difficult or painful experiences.

¶ 2-3. Describe the difficult experience you had, in some detail.

¶ 4. Describe who or what helped you turn the experience from a bad one to a good one.

¶ 5. Conclusion: Summarize what you've learned from the experience.



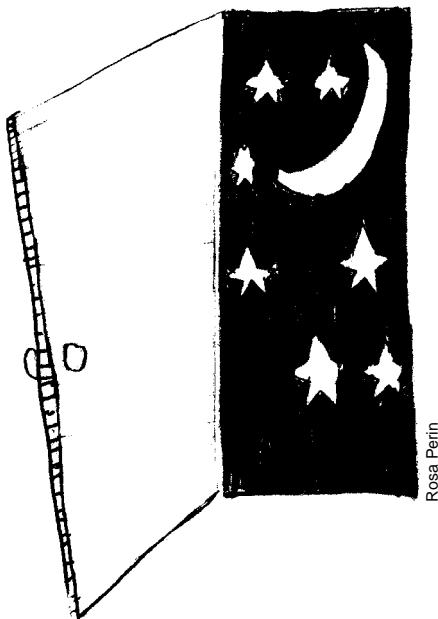
## Help Students Achieve Healthy Independence

Two stories in this issue look at the issue of teen independence: "The Night I Snuck Out," a contest entry by Dariana Mercedes (p. 19), and "Pierced" by Anonymous (p. 24).

Teens are exploring the boundaries of independence every day and love to talk about it. These stories are great discussion starters.

The goal of this discussion and writing assignment is to acknowledge and affirm that risk-taking is an important part of growing up and to help teens become more self-aware of the risk-taking process so they will get more satisfaction out of the risks they take.

Dariana sneaks out of her house until 2:30 a.m. and has a blast. But when she returns home her brother is waiting on the stoop with the police. Dariana is mortified about the worry she caused her family.



The anonymous writer of Pierced gets her belly button pierced and has to hide it from her mother. Despite four months of pain, she has no regrets because to her the piercing represents her growing individualism and independence.

### Discussion questions

Should Dariana have snuck out? Should Anonymous have gotten her piercing? What risks did they each face? What rewards did they get? Were the rewards worth the risks?

What other things do teens do to assert their independence? Are some of them more risky than others? Are some risks too great for the possible rewards?

Do parents understand that teens need to assert their independence? Do some parents try so hard to prevent teens from harm that they



stifle their independence? Are some parents so loose that they don't provide enough guidance? What do teens want from their parents in the way of guidelines or support?

### Writing assignment (short essay)

Ask the teens to think of one thing they'd like to do to show their independence that they (or their parents, or their friends) also think is pretty risky. What are the risks of doing that thing? What might be the benefits? Is there anything else they might do which would have similar benefits, but smaller risks? For example, a belly button piercing is not as risky as a tongue piercing. Staying out late is not as risky if you stay in your neighborhood with people you know. Having sex is one way to be more independent, but the physical risks can be reduced by using protection; the emotional risks can be reduced by being careful about who you get intimate with.

## Foster Care Section

There are about 12,000 adolescents in the New York City foster care system, and tens of thousands of today's teens were in care at one time or have had friends or family members in care. For most young people who go into care it is a traumatizing experience. Their physical and emotional lives are terribly disrupted, and on top of that they often feel stigma and shame about the fact of being in care.

This special section (pp. 8-12) is taken largely from Youth Communication's other magazine, Represent: The Voice of Youth in Care. It can help your students better understand what their peers in care are going through. For teens in care, it will help affirm that they have nothing to be ashamed about.

## Practice Lesson for Regents Exam Listening Section

Use story: "CUNY Costs Hurt Us" p. 9

**What the teacher needs to know to use this lesson** The Regents English exam has a listening section. A proctor reads the students an **Overview** (see below) and **The Situation** (see below). The proctor then reads a passage to the students, twice, during which time the students can take notes. The students then answer some multiple choice questions and write a report based on the **Situation**.

### Step One Read the Overview And the Situations

(Note: During the real test the students have a printed version of the Overview and the Situation in front of them as the proctor reads the story. If you can't make copies of the overview and situation consider writing them or the board or just read it aloud to the class.)

Read this to your students:

**Overview:** You will listen to an article written by a teenager about how the recent increase in tuition at the City University of New York (CUNY) will affect students. You will then answer some multiple choice questions and write a report on the situation described below. You will hear the article twice. You may take notes.

**The Situation:** Your class is meeting with your city council person to talk about the CUNY tuition hikes. You must write a position paper which will educate the council person on how the tuition increases will affect students. Listen to this story and then use information from the story to write your position paper.

### Step Two Tell your students, "Now I will read the passage aloud to you for the first time."

Read the story.

After reading the story once, say:

"You make take a few minutes to look over The Situation and your notes. (Pause) Now I will read the story again."

### Step Three: Multiple Choice Questions And Report

After reading the article for the second time give them the questions on the next page. The next page also contains guidelines for writing the report. (Photocopy them at your school.)

Here are the answers to the multiple choice questions:

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

# CUNY Costs Hurt Us

## Multiple Choice Questions

**Directions:** Use your notes to answer the questions about the story read to you.

**1) According to the writer, what is the main reason for the tuition increase at CUNY?**

- a) increasing costs
- b) cutbacks in government funding
- c) students have enough money to pay the increase
- d) politicians don't care about students

**2) The author claims she will not use which of the following methods to pay for college?**

- a) take out a loan
- b) accept her parents' help
- c) scholarships
- d) work part-time

**3) During what decade did CUNY start charging tuition?**

- a) 1960s
- b) 1970s
- c) 1980s
- d) 1990s

**4) What expression best describes the author's main emotional reaction to the tuition hike?**

- a) fear that she won't be able to afford college
- b) calm acceptance
- c) disbelief
- d) angry determination to go to college

**5) How much is the CUNY tuition at four-year colleges?**

- a) \$3,200
- b) \$4,000
- c) \$4,200
- d) \$4,500

**6) What other expense does the author use as an example of how "everything is going up?"**

- a) price of books
- b) running shoes
- c) transportation
- d) movie prices

**7. Why does the author plan to attend a CUNY school?**

- a) CUNY schools are cheaper than other schools
- b) she doesn't say why
- c) she wants to go to school in the city
- d) she wants to take courses in the city

**NOTE:** Below are the written instructions which accompany the test about writing the report. You may want to hand these out or write them on the board.

### Writing the Report

**Your task:** Write a paper about the impact of the CUNY tuition hikes on students. Use specific and relevant information from the article you heard.

Here are the guidelines given on the actual Regents exam:

- Tell your audience what they need to know about the tuition hikes.
- Use specific, accurate, and relevant information from the article to support your discussion.
- Use a tone and level of language appropriate for the high school students who will read your paper.
- Organize your ideas in a logical and coherent manner.
- Indicate any words taken directly from the article by using quotation marks or referring to the writer.
- Follow the conventions of standard written English.