



# Tips for Teachers

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

September/October 2008

## IN THIS ISSUE

### Writing Contests \$275 in Prizes

Reminder: Your students can enter the contest by going to our website and clicking on the “enter contest” button. Our web address is [youthcomm.org](http://youthcomm.org).

### Writing Contest #190, p. 2

“What’s something you’ve done or said that you’d like to take back?”  
Deadline extended to: October 10, 2008

### Writing Lesson: The Timeline

1. Before the group meets, write a simple time line on the board: three boxes in a row labeled “Before what I did,” “What

I did” and “After what I did.” Draw another box beneath these boxes and label it, “What if I made another choice?”

2. Tell the group that everyone has regretted something. If you feel comfortable, offer a personal example of your own—or give one from a book or movie, or today’s news.

3. Ask the group if they know anyone who has done something they regretted. Ask for two or three examples but ask them not to mention anyone’s name. (Sometimes it’s easier to start thinking about a personal topic if you first think about other people being in



## Open House for New Writers Wednesday, Oct. 15, 4 p.m.

Do you know young people who want to write for *New Youth Connections* magazine? Teens work closely with our experienced teaching staff and write stories read by tens of thousands of their peers.

We are hosting an Open House from 4-6 p.m. on Wednesday October 15<sup>th</sup> for high school students ages 15-20 interested in writing for NYC.

**Please consider referring a teen in your school or program.** Writing ability is not the main criterion. (We run a strong writing training program.) Rather, the teens who are most successful here are those who want to have a voice, who like reading the stories in the magazine, and who want to help others by telling their stories and those of their peers.

For details, see the ad on page 19 of this issue or visit our website at [youthcomm.org](http://youthcomm.org).

### Attention College Counselors

This issue is packed with information about how to succeed once you get into college—including interviews with college professors and college students who share the secrets to college success. (And it won’t take a genius to figure out that the secrets to college success are not that different from the secrets to success in high school. This

is a great issue to spark discussion and reflection about what it takes to be a good student.)

### Get NYC Online for Free

We put many of each issue’s stories on our web site. Send us an email at [freestories@youthcomm.org](mailto:freestories@youthcomm.org) and we will put you on our mailing list to alert you each time we post new stories.

the situation.) You can also ask them if they are reading any novels or plays with characters that did something they rued. (An alternative would be to have them complete a sentence on index cards, “The one thing I regret the most is the time I \_\_\_\_\_,” and then read them aloud or write them on a flip chart.)

4. Explain to your group how the time line will work. The “before” box will introduce how they felt before they did the regrettable thing. For each box they should write brief answers to the following questions (you can have them on the board):  
—What time of day and year did it happen? Day, night, winter, summer?  
—What places were involved? School, street, your home?  
—Who was with you when it happened? Friends, enemies, relatives, teachers?  
—What emotions prompted your decision? Anger, jealousy, laziness, concern for another’s happiness?  
—What other choices did you have?  
—What senses were involved? What were the smells, sounds, sights, etc.?

**Simple activity:** Ask students to take

what they've written and turn it into a brief essay that they can submit to the contest. Each essay will have the same structure: before what I did, what I did, after what I did, and what if I made another choice (where they imagine what would have happened if they had done something different).

**Extension idea—A more complicated approach to structure:** Students often think writing “just happens.” They don't realize that good writers think carefully about the relationship between what they want to convey to the reader and the impact of different ways of structuring or ordering their scenes. Here is an activity that will help your teens see that structure makes a difference.

When students have finished their four scenes, tell them that they have to consider different ways of ordering them (other than the time line order that is on the board). Do they want to open with the idyllic vision of the corrected present, then crash into it with the real present? Would it be more attention-grabbing to have the reader imagine the mistake they made, then hear them speak of regret, or the other way around? *Which order will make the reader want to continue reading?* Which order will leave the reader thinking or feeling something they will have trouble forgetting when the story is over?

Tell students they can put each scene on a separate piece of paper and move the pieces around to test out various orders, like a puzzle. Whatever order they choose, they should try to make their final section the one with the most emotional power, the “knockout punch” of their story.

Note: You may also have to teach a mini-lesson on transitions. Students will

see that simply rearranging the scenes is not enough. They may have to change the endings and the beginning of some scenes to help the reader once they have violated the straight, chronological order of the story.

## Writing Contest #191, p. 2

“What do you think about the pregnancy of 17-year-old Bristol Palin (daughter of Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin)? Deadline: November 17, 2008

### Discussion Activity

As your teens probably know, VP candidate Sarah Palin's 17-year-old daughter Bristol is pregnant. The father, Levi Johnston, is a high school dropout who described himself on his MySpace page as a “f-cking redneck” who doesn't want kids and whose idea of fun is to “do some fishing, shoot some sh-t.”

Ask your students what they know about the situation. Have they even heard about it? Do they know anything about Bristol other than the fact that she's pregnant? Do they know about Levi's self-characterization? Do they know that during the time she got pregnant her parents were apparently clueless that they were in a relationship? (News reports said the parents thought they were “just friends.”)

To get your students thinking about this topic ask them to read the comments of teens who are waiting to have sex (“What Are You Waiting For?” on page 17). Note that all the comments are about wanting to wait for strong emotional connection before having sex and none are about fears of getting STDs or getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant. Do

they think desire for a strong connection is the most prevalent attitude among their abstaining friends? Do they think it's the best reason to abstain?

## Writing Lesson

**Ask students to write their essay based on one of these three prompts:**

- 1) Write a letter of advice to Bristol. What does she need to hear? Should she really marry Levi? How should she decide? What will it be like being a teen mom? Should she continue her education?
- 2) Write a letter of advice to Levi. (Address the same questions.)
- 3) If they have followed the media coverage, ask them to comment on how the media has treated the teen pregnancy of a white governor's daughter versus how they feel teen pregnancy is usually portrayed.

## Writing Lesson Turning Points

“Beating the Odds,” by Sayda Morales, p. 7

Introduction: Sayda Morales describes how her aunt, Sayda Dubok, struggled to get her college degree. There are many turning points in the story: she can't get a scholarship because she's an illegal immigrant; she works as a waitress and gets no respect; she's inspired by her mom's sacrifices; she starts at community college; she must take and retake many remedial classes; she runs out of money; she gets a green card; she borrows money; she has surgery; she gets engaged.

Turning points make stories interesting because negative ones make the reader think everything might go straight downhill, and positive ones make the reader think things may turn out all right. Going back and forth between positive and negative turning points keeps the reader engaged because she wants to know how it turns out in the end.

Though your students are young, they have already had many turning points in their lives—whether it's in relationships with family or friends in school, health-related, etc. By focusing on turning points, they can write an interesting essay.

### The Lesson

**1. Introduce the story.** Briefly explain that it is the story of the aunt of a girl named Sayda Morales, told in the aunt's own words. (Sayda interviewed her.)

**2. Introduce the idea of a turning point.** Ask students to describe turning

## Get More Teaching Resources at the Youth Communication Website ([www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org))

- You can order dozens of books and teacher guides on topics your students are interested in.

- You can download over 250 stories from past issues of *New Youth Connections* and *Represent: The Voice of Youth in Foster Care*.

- You can download lesson ideas from past issues of “Tips for Teachers.”



- You can find out about writing workshops for young people in foster care.

- You can browse our book and DVD catalog and order from our e-store.

- You can have your students enter our writing contests.

points in their lives, or ones they've read about or seen on TV. Remember, turning points can be good (graduating from college) or bad (losing all your money in the stock market). Point out that it's only a turning point if something changes afterwards: graduating from college gets you off public assistance; losing your money makes you quit working on Wall Street and become a teacher.

**3. Read the story** (aloud or silently). Tell the students to circle each place they see a turning point in the story.

**4. Writing activity.** Adapt the activity that is described for Writing Contest #190: "What's something you've done or said that you'd like to take back?" (Have students create a three-part timeline, with "before the turning point," "the turning point," and "after the turning point.")

Point out that the goal is to keep the reader on the edge of her seat. So, for example, if the turning point is the death of a supportive grandparent, the essay should start with a strong description of the relationship with the grandparent. Then the turning point is the death. After the turning point is a description of how the teen struggles to cope with the loss of the support. (This is also a good chance to introduce the idea of **foreshadowing**. Each story should begin with a hint of the turning point to come. For example, the grandparent story could begin, "My grandmother and I were so close I couldn't imagine ever being without her. My earliest memory of her is...."

## Metaphor Activity

### What's the best metaphor for life?

Use Sayda's story and Langston Hughes' poem, "Mother to Son," to spark a discussion about metaphors. (This is a very concrete way to help students grasp the concept of metaphor.)

Ask students: What's the central metaphor in Hughes' poem? (crystal stair). How does he extend the metaphor to make you feel it (tacks, splinters, etc). What metaphor does he use for a turning point? (landings).

Ask the students to come up with their own metaphors for life. (Rocky road, twisting path, slip-n-slide, etc.) Then ask them to extend each metaphor into a poem. Or ask them to take Sayda's story and turn it into a poem with a central metaphor.

## Mother to Son

Well, son, I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it,  
And splinters,  
And boards torn up,  
And places with no carpet on the floor—  
Bare.  
But all the time  
I've been a-climbin' on,  
And reachin' landin's,  
And turnin' corners,  
And sometimes goin' in the dark  
Where there ain't been no light.  
So boy, don't you turn back.  
Don't you set down on the steps  
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.  
Don't you fall now—  
For I've still goin', honey,  
I've still climbin',  
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

—Langston Hughes



## Am I College Material?

### "Community College: A Second Chance," by Jordan Temple, p. 24

Success in college requires lots of things, but one of them is humility. You're there to learn from people who know more than you do. Developing a personality that blends determination to succeed with the understanding that you have a lot to learn is very difficult for some young people—especially if they feel insecure.

## Discussion Activity

Ask students: What was Jordan's opinion of himself when he started high school? (Know-it-all with false confidence.) How did that affect him as a student? (He wandered the halls, didn't do his work.) What was wrong with his attitude? (In class he would have been exposed: no one "knows it all." That's why we go to school, to learn more.)

What was Jordan's personality like when he got to Onondaga? (Shy; slacker image.) What was the result? (Kept to himself.)

How did he change? (Developed more trust; became "himself," dropped the slacker image; began to open up.)

What happened? (He was able to benefit from a study skills class; he joined a club and became a mentor to a Korean student; he ran for a leadership position; he learned how to study and applied what he learned; he discovered himself—that he's a kid who loves to read, loves to learn, and loves baseball.)

**KEY QUESTIONS:** Ask students to describe the old Jordan. Then ask them to describe the new Jordan. How has he changed? What has he gained? What has he lost? What will the admissions director at Syracuse think of him? What might some of his old friends from high school think about him? Could Jordan have maintained the "know it all" image or the "slacker" image and still succeeded in college?

What do they think was hardest for him in dropping the old image of himself?

## Writing assignment

### (3 paragraphs)

**1st paragraph:** Students should describe their current self-image. They must give it a name (e.g., slacker, nerd, goth, homeboy, etc.), and describe it.

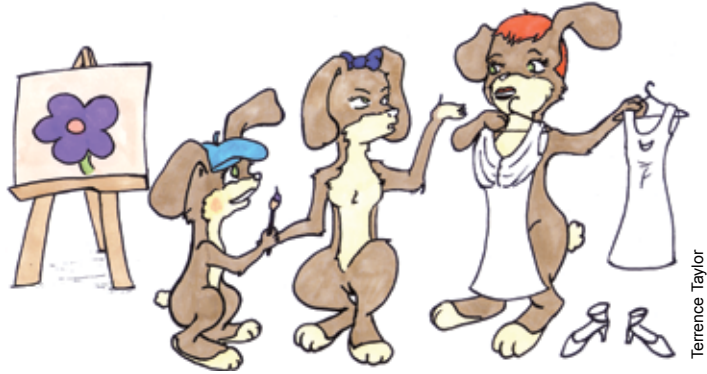
**2nd paragraph:** Students must explain the effect of their self-image on their success (or lack of success) in school. How does who they are as a person affect who they are as a student?

**3rd paragraph:** Students must imagine a different self-image. (This can be one they'd really like to have, or just one to play around with.) They should briefly describe this image and how it would make them a different kind of student.

## Letter Writing...

### A Great Way to Teach Basic Writing Skills (and get your students published!)

Our young writers love to get letters. We love to publish them. Writing a letter to a student can be a good short writing assignment. Do it as a group exercise and send the batch to: Letters, Youth Communication, 224 W. 29<sup>th</sup> St. 2<sup>nd</sup> fl, NY, NY 10001.



## Letter Writing Assignments

Tell your group you want them to send a letter to one of the writers in this issue. *New Youth Connections* will probably publish a few, depending on their quality.

The following are sure-fire prompts that you can use for writing letters about many of the stories in this issue (you can write these on the board):

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 or points of view that they can take regarding the stories they read:

- Sympathize
- Criticize
- Advise
- Discourage or encourage
- Compare something in the story with their experiences
- Ask the writer questions

Here are stories that might inspire your group to send us letters. Remind your students that they have to read the story before they can write a letter.

### “Sister in the Middle,” by Shameeka Dowling, p. 3.

Write to Shameeka about the struggles and joys you have experienced with your siblings. How are your feelings and experiences similar to or different from Shameeka’s?

Write to her about how you compete with your siblings. Do you compete for the same things as they do in the story?

Write to her about how you try to imitate your siblings. Are there times when you try to do the opposite of what they do?

Do you admire Shameeka? Tell her what parts of the story made you admire

her. Were there parts of the story where you think she made a mistake?

Tell Shameeka what you think Asatta will be like when she’s grown up. What happens in the story to make you think so?

### “No More Hand-Holding,” by Edgar Lopez, p. 16.

Do you want to be independent like Edgar? Write and tell him why, or why not. What are the benefits? What are the risks? Give examples from his life and yours to support what you feel.

What advice do you have for Edgar as he enters his freshman year in college? How independent should he try to be? Is there any danger in not getting help when he needs it? What would you encourage him to do?

What do you think of Edgar’s persistence and his desire to do well in school? Do you plan to do things differently? Write to Edgar and tell him why you would like to be his friend.

Does Edgar remind you of yourself or anyone you know?

### Imagining College “Mishaps and Milestones,” p. 9

#### Discussion Activity

One huge advantage that many wealthier kids have is that they know what to expect in college because many of the people around them have been to college. This activity will help your students get a better understanding of what college is like.

1. Test your group’s attitudes toward going to college.

—Make sure your group knows what

mishaps and a milestones are.

—Make a list on the board of the topics the interviews in the story address. They are:

- What are your expectations?
- What will the college atmosphere be like?
- What’s important to know before you go?
- What is the hardest thing about going to college?
- What are some of the distractions at college?
- Will you be the first in your family to attend college?

2. Ask them to write two sentences for each topic. Tell them to think about the kind of people, the physical surroundings, what emotions people feel when they are on campus, etc.

3. Read the article and then lead a discussion that compares their answers to the responses in the interviews. What responses matched the ones in the article? Which were different? Were there any major surprises?

**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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