Dear Educators,

Welcome to the school year’s final issue of YCteen! Now that the spring testing is over, many of us welcome the opportunity to refocus on our classroom communities. This issue—with stories about teens navigating the complexities of romantic, friendship, and family relationships—can help you re-engage your students’ social and emotional learning.

The stories model how real teens built their self-awareness and relationship skills. For example, in “Soulmates,” Donyaeh realizes that confiding in his girlfriend helps him cope with his mother’s illness. In “Even Loners Need Friends,” Wensley works on shyness. And Damia challenges her mother’s prejudice in “Would My Mom Still Love Me If I Were a Lesbian?” You can use the Open-Ended Questions at the end of this guide to discuss any of those stories with your students.

Our two lessons here do double duty: they develop literacy and target social and emotional learning. In the lesson that accompanies “My First Boyfriend,” students will explore their dating values and listen to the diversity of their peers’ opinions, while also applying key reading comprehension skills. The lesson that accompanies “I’m Not You, Mom” prompts students to model self-advocacy skills of seeking and offering help when needed, while also engaging them in text-based discussions.

We hope this year’s lesson guides have contributed to your instructional efforts and helped you build community in your classroom. We ask for your feedback—good or bad—in our enclosed subscriber survey. (One lucky respondent will win $250 Visa gift card!).

Finally, if you have budding writers in your class who are between the ages of 15 and 20, encourage them to apply to our summer workshop (details at the end of this guide) before the May 22nd deadline!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Johnson
Education Director
Before Reading the Story (15 min)
This opening activity will activate background knowledge to boost reading comprehension and set the emotional tone for the story.

1. Introduce **opinion continuum** by explaining that it is an activity about sharing, and listening to, diverse perspectives from your peers on a common question. All viewpoints are welcome.

2. Explain to students that in this activity we will be exploring our different dating values, which include the different things we want or don’t want in a partner and our likes and dislikes about dating activities and behaviors. Values are personal and unique to each of us. Values are also flexible and can change over time based on our experiences.

3. **Opinion continuum** directions: Clear a large area in the center of the room. On one end post a sign that reads “Strongly Agree” and on the other one that reads “Strongly Disagree.” Have students gather in the center of the space. “For each statement I read, move towards the sign that matches your opinion. You can stand anywhere along the continuum. In the middle is not sure/depends. After each statement we will pause to share, and listen to, our different reasons for where we stand.

4. Read the following statements and follow the directions above. Encourage students to consider past, current, and future romantic/dating partners when answering.
- Good friends can become ideal romantic partners.
- I like to have a lot of physical affection in public (PDA) with my partner (holding hands, kissing, cuddling).
- I usually prefer to go out with my partner in a group of friends.
- A lot of texts and calls from my partner make me feel cared about.
- I like to have time away from my partner to be involved in activities that are important to me and that I enjoy.
- It would be okay with me to cancel plans with friends/family because my partner asked me to.
- I want a partner that I can talk openly and honestly about sex with.
- It’s OK to say “I love you” even if you’re not sure it’s true in order to not hurt your partner’s feelings.
- Being in a romantic relationship always includes sexual activity.
- It’s OK if my partner and I have different religious beliefs and/or political opinions.
- Breaking up through a text message is OK.

5. Large group debrief: Direct students to return to their seats and ask the following questions.
- Did you learn anything new about yourself in this activity?
- Did you learn anything new about your peers?
- What are some advantages to figuring out your dating values/preferences BEFORE you become romantically and sexually involved with someone?
  (Note: Observe with the group that a lot of different personal values and opinions were shared in the activity. Taking the time to get to know someone’s dating values before you get seriously involved can help you know if they are a good fit for you. By contrast, making assumptions can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding.)

**During Reading (20 min.)**

*By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, students build comprehension and support fluency.*

1. Introduce the story (see the summary above).

2. Share the expectations for a group read aloud; volunteers take turns reading aloud as much or as little as they would like. As the teacher, you may stop periodically to discuss or check in on active reading by asking students to share their responses to the story.

3. Tell students they will practice an active reading strategy called **reading for a purpose**. This will help them read for a purpose and be prepared to use the text in later activities.

4. **Reading for a purpose** directions: “Notice when the writer has an experience with her partner that helps her learn more about, or articulate, her dating values. Draw a star in the margins next to the text that shows this.”

5. While sitting in a circle, read the story aloud together. Stop to discuss periodically, supporting peer-to-peer talk and non-judgmental listening. To do this, ask for volunteers to share what they drew a star next to and why. Alternately, you can pose an open question such as “What stands out to you in this section and why?”
6. Next, ask the group to further consider these questions:
   - What are some additional examples in the text where the writer is figuring out her dating values? What was the experience and what is the value?
   - What dating values do you share with the writer? Why?
   - What do you think are the biggest lessons Julia learned about herself and about dating from her experiences with Peter?
   - What do you think Julia might do differently in her next romantic relationship?

After Reading the Story (15 min)
During this post-reading activity students will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

1. **Pair share** directions: Students should select a partner and/or turn to the person next to them. Facing each other, and practicing active listening, partners each take a turn sharing their responses to the prompt. Each speaker will have two minutes to talk. The listener does not need to respond. After two minutes, direct partners to switch roles.

2. **Pair share** prompt: “To you, what are the most important ingredients in a relationship?”

3. Ask the students to **write an ad** searching for the “perfect” person with whom to have a “perfect” relationship. Their paragraph should incorporate what they have learned about their own expectations, needs, and values in this lesson. Tell your students that a dating ad often contains information about both the person you are seeking and yourself. (As an alternative, students could write the ad from Julia’s perspective.)

4. Invite volunteers to share their writing with the class.
Before Reading the Story (10 min)

This opening activity will activate background knowledge to boost reading comprehension and set the emotional tone for the story.

1. Introduce freewriting by explaining that students will have four minutes to respond to a prompt in writing. The goal is to express their thoughts freely without worry about writing conventions. The expectation is that everyone writes, without stopping, for the full time. (Note: writing lists and/or drawing with labels are modifications that support diverse learners.)

2. Share the following quote from the story (posted up): “This is just temporary; life isn’t always going to be like this. Stay strong.”

3. Freewrite prompt: “Think about what this quote means to you and connections you can make to your own life. For example, has this advice been true for you and helped you get through a hard time? Do you have a friend or family member who could use this advice?”

4. Pair share directions: Students should select a partner and/or turn to the person next to them. Facing each other, and practicing active listening, partners each take a turn sharing their responses to the freewrite prompt. Each speaker will have two minutes to talk and is in charge of what they choose to share from their writing. The listener does not need to respond. After two minutes, direct partners to switch roles. (Note: because
During Reading (20 min)

By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, students build comprehension and support fluency.

1. Introduce the story (see the summary above).

2. Share the expectations for a group read aloud; volunteers take turns reading aloud as much or as little as they would like. As the teacher, you may stop periodically to discuss or check in by asking students to share their responses to the story.

3. Tell students they will be practicing an active reading strategy called reading for a purpose. This will help them locate specific information they will need for later.

4. Reading for a purpose directions: Explain to the group that in addition to “staying strong,” the writer of this story needs support to get through a difficult time with her mother. Read for moments in the text when the writer does, or should, ask for help or advocate for herself. Draw a star in the margins next to those examples.

5. While sitting in a circle, read the story aloud together. Stop to discuss periodically, supporting peer-to-peer talk and non-judgmental listening. To do this, ask for volunteers to share what they drew a star next to and why. Alternately, you can pose an open question such as “What stands out to you in this section and why?”

6. Next, ask the group to further consider these questions:
   - Why do you think Isela’s mom places so much responsibility on her? Is it fair? Why or why not?
   - Does Isela love her mom? How do you know?
   - Does Isela’s mom love her? How do you know?

After Reading the Story (20 min)

During this post-reading activity students will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

1. Text based discussion directions: Have students return to the story and locate the other examples they identified by drawing a star in the margins. Together, generate a list of the people in Isela’s life who she does, or could have, asked for help. The list, written up, should include:
   - Her dad
   - Her mom
   - Her history teacher
   - Other teachers or staff at school
   - Emelly
   - Daniel

For each person listed, talk about what happened in the story. Did Isela ask for help, advocate for her needs, or say nothing? How did the person respond? How do you think
the person should have responded? (Note: take a moment to think creatively about what her friends Emelly and Daniel can offer for support that is appropriate for a peer, such as advice and encouragement or coming over to help with dishes one day a week.)

(Note: for an example to illustrate the difference between asking for help or advocating for her needs, consider the history teacher. Isela could have advocated for herself by asking for an extension on the project, explaining why, and agreeing to a new deadline. She could also seek help if it’s a teacher she had a good relationship with by asking to talk after class and sharing how her responsibilities at home are an obstacle to being successful in school.)

2. **Role Play** directions:
   - Introduce the guidelines for an *improv role play*: The prompt will present a dramatic conflict to the two players who respond on their feet (no scripting or rehearsing), using what they have learned about Isela and her friends and family. If the players get stuck, they can call a “freeze” in the dramatic action and ask their peer for suggestions. Role plays should be fun and safe, so no physical contact and the audience shows support through active listening.

   - Next, direct students to form triads. One person will play the role of Isela, and one will be her father, teacher, or friend. The third person will help to generate ideas and support the players if they get stuck (perfect for a reluctant actor). Players should refer to the text for insight into their character. Once groups are formed, read the prompt and direct students to agree on roles, and begin. Move around the room supporting. Encourage several rounds with pauses in between to generate ideas, refer to the text, and switch roles.

   - **Role play** prompt: “Isela is stressed-out about the responsibilities she has at home. She is depressed and angry at her mom’s disregard for her feelings and her needs. Although it’s hard for her, Isela decides to ask for help and talk to her dad, her teacher, or her friend (choose one). The other person is reluctant to get involved, forcing Isela to really advocate for what she needs.”

3. **Activity De-brief**: After thanking the actors for participating in the role play, bring the group together for a discussion. Consider the following questions:
   - At the end of her story, Isela says “My mom and I aren’t fully recovered but we’re slowly healing bit by bit together, as a team. In the meantime I’ve learned that when I’m going through difficult times, I can’t keep my feelings inside. It’s OK to depend on other people without worrying that I’ll be burdening them.” What do you think Isela has learned about love? About the people in her life? About herself?
   - What personal connections can you make to this story? What personal takeaways do you have from the activities?
Open-ended questions you can use with any story in YCteen:

1. What main problem or challenge did the writer face?
2. What choices did the teen have in trying to deal with the problem?
3. Which way of dealing with the problem was most effective for the teen? Why?
4. What strengths, skills, or resources did the teen use to address the challenge?
5. If you were in the writer's shoes what would you have done?
6. What could adults have done better to help this teen?
7. What have you learned from reading this story that you didn’t know before?
8. What connections from your own life, the world, or other text you have read, can you make to this story? This reminds me of…. (text-to-self, text-to-world, text-to-text)
9. What surprised you in this story?
10. Do you have a different view of this issue, or see a different way of dealing with it, after reading this story? Why or why not?
How was your transition to high school?
Making a successful transition from middle to high school can be tough. What was your most difficult challenge—adjusting to harder schoolwork? Making new friends? Family issues? Tell us about a challenge you faced, how you managed it, and how it affected your ability to succeed in high school.

Deadline: October 3, 2015

FOR NEW YORK CITY RESIDENTS AGES 15-20

11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Mon. – Thurs.

Be part of Youth Communication’s 36th annual intensive summer writing workshop. You will get one-on-one mentoring from a professional editor, write and revise personal stories about your life, go on field trips, and make friends with other writers. You will also participate in writing lessons and group activities exploring what it means to be a modern young man or young woman, as well as other topics. No prior experience is required, but you must be able to attend every day. Thousands of people will read your stories in our magazines and on our websites. Workshop alumni have gone on to attend colleges from Hunter to Harvard.

The workshop is free because our funders cover the $3,000 cost for each participant. All participants get a MetroCard and $5 for lunch each day. (Additionally, youth in foster care will receive a $600 stipend upon successful completion of the workshop.)

“Writing for Youth Communication, I grew as a young man. I no longer hold back what I feel. Now I put my true thoughts in ink.”
—Melvin, 19

APPLY ONLINE BY MAY 22, 2015:
bit.ly/ycteenwrite

Top candidates will be contacted by June 5
Youth Communication publishes personal narratives by teens in two award-winning magazines: YCteen, by and for New York City high school students, and Represent, by and for young people in foster care. This is a competitive program—there will be a maximum of 15 students—so start working on your application essays now!

**Dates and Times:** The workshop runs Monday through Thursday from July 6 to August 13. The hours are from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. You must be able to attend every day.

**Cost:** The workshop is free because our funders cover the $3,000 cost for each participant.

**Stipend:** We provide MetroCards and $5 for lunch each day. (Youth in foster care will also receive a $600 stipend upon successful completion of the workshop.)

**Facilities:** The workshop will be taught at the Youth Communication office in mid-town Manhattan. The office is easily accessible by many subway lines.

**Staff:** Writers will be taught by Youth Communication editors who have substantial experience working in journalism and youth development.

**Eligibility:** Anyone ages 15 to 20 who lives within commuting distance is eligible to apply. We’re interested in your writing skills, but when we judge your essays we will also look for your ideas and willingness to write deeply personal stories. Youth Communication’s most essential job is to convey important information to teens in an interesting way.

**History:** This is the 36th year we have run the summer program. Workshop alumni have gone on to attend colleges from Hunter to Harvard, and they include reporters, lawyers, teachers, and authors.

**DEADLINE**

Applications must be received by May 22, 2015.

Top candidates will be contacted by June 5 for interviews.

**Apply online at:** bit.ly/ycteenwrite

Or mail to:
Youth Communication
Summer Writing Workshop
224 West 29th St., 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10001

Or fax to: 212-279-8856

**Today’s date_________Your age_________**

**Name_________________________**

**Address_________________________Apt.______**

**City_________________________Zip________**

**School_________________________Grade____**

**Phone (____)_________Date of birth________**

**E-mail_________________________@________**

**Male _____ Female _____ Other ________**

**Race/ethnicity (check all that apply)**

_____Black  ____Latino  ____White  ____Asian  
____Other_________________________

**Where did you hear about the workshop?**
(e.g., teacher, ad in YCteen or Represent, website, foster care agency, social worker, etc.)

______________________________

**If you’re in foster care, what is your agency?**

______________________________

On separate pieces of paper, answer each of the **three following questions**, and attach it to this application. **Please be thorough, but try to keep each answer to one page. Do not write more than two pages on any one answer. Print neatly or type.**

1) Youth Communication publishes personal stories. Come up with two or three story ideas about your life and write one paragraph about each of them.

2) The summer workshop requires writers who are mature and focused. Writers must both participate in group lessons and work quietly at their computers on their stories, sometimes several hours at a time without a break. You must be open to working with an editor, who often suggests big changes to what you’ve written. Tell us in a paragraph why you’d be good at the group activities, at working alone, and at incorporating edits into your story. Also tell us why this appeals to you.

3) This summer’s theme is gender. Have you felt pressure—by friends, family, or the media— to be a certain way because of your gender, e.g. to “act like a lady” or “man up”? How have you responded to these expectations? Write an essay describing a time you felt that pressure and how it shaped your understanding of what it means to be male or female.

**Questions?** Call Virginia Vitzthum at 212-279-0708, extension 112.