

September/October 2015

Ycteen

LESSON GUIDE

Dear Educators,

Welcome to a new school year and thank you for continuing to bring *Ycteen* to your students! This issue is designed to help build community within the classroom--essential for a successful start to the year.

In spite of “summer slide” and sometimes significant barriers to school success, most students begin the school year with a sincere desire to be successful. Many have even spent time thinking and talking about what they are going to do differently. It’s my experience, however, that this motivation has a fairly short shelf life as old patterns creep back in and pressures mount—unless educators step in to bolster that motivation. you

Asking about and listening to students’ goals, and concretely working with them to make positive changes will nurture their persistence. The lesson here can help with that. It accompanies DeAnna Lyle’s story, “From Slacker to Star Student,” and helps students recognize the attitudes and habits that are holding them back, identify the strengths they already have that will help them achieve their goals, and ponder what supports they need to get there.

This summer has been a busy one for Youth Communication: our new professional services model has taken flight and I have been busy training educators and youth workers around the city who, like you, value social and emotional learning and know the power of Youth Communication stories. We also moved to a new office where we just began conducting trainings for educators, an exciting but time-consuming task. I look forward to preparing a full lesson guide, with additional resources, to accompany our next issue in November.



Sincerely,

Elizabeth Johnson
Education Director





ELA Literacy & Social and Emotional Learning

Letting Go, Holding On

Story to Use: “[From Slacker to Star Student](#),” by DeAnna Lyles.

Story Summary: DeAnna's habit of cutting class finally catches up with her. She decides to transfer to a new school, but first she must prove that she's serious about starting over.

Lesson Objectives and Common Core Connections:

- Students make personal connections to a text and successfully participate in story-based activities and discussions.
- Students will respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives (CCLS SL.1).
- Students have an opportunity to reflect on previous experiences for growth and learning.
- Students will read and comprehend literary nonfiction proficiently (CCLS R.10).
- Students will write routinely over extended and shorter time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences (CCLS W.10).

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. Welcome students to the group. Introduce the lesson by telling them you will be reading a true story by a teen who decides to make changes in order to reach her academic goals.
2. Introduce the **freewrite** by reminding students it is an opportunity to freely express their thoughts on paper without worrying about spelling and grammar. Students will have about three minutes to write in response to the prompt.
3. **Freewrite prompt:** “Think of a time when you have made a significant change in your life. What was the change? Why did you make it? What did you lose in the process? What did you gain?”
4. After students have completed the freewrite, transition to a **pair share**. Students should select a partner 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.

5. Large group debrief: Bring pairs back into the large group and ask the following questions:
 - What is hard about making a change?
 - What motivates us to persist through the change?
 - Would anyone like to share their freewrite response with the large group?

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: When you notice DeAnna making a change in her thinking or actions, write a “C” in the margin of the story.
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 wrote a “C” 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 did DeAnna learn about herself as a student and how did that inform her choice to change schools?
 - What changed for DeAnna between her first interview and her second?
 - What are DeAnna’s academic goals? What changes did she make to get back on track to meet them?
 - What internal changes in her thinking and attitude did DeAnna make?
 - Does anyone connect with DeAnna’s story? How?

After Reading the Story (15 min)

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

1. Introduce the activity **letting go, holding on** by explaining to the group that personal change and growth involve loss and the careful nurturing of agency. Even when the change being made is positive, it usually involves letting go of some things that have meaning in our lives. Likewise, breaking old patterns to make change can be really hard and takes strength and perseverance. This activity begins with self-reflection, moves to personal sharing in the group, and extends to (optional) writing.
2. Read the following prompt to the group: “To reach my personal and academic goals this year, one change I am going to make is...”
3. When posing the prompt to the group, ask them to consider the attitudes, thinking, people, places, and behaviors they would need to “let go of” in their life in order successfully make this change. These are the things that hold them back, are hurtful, or that they've outgrown. For DeAnna to be successful she had to let go of her pattern of cutting class and her “screw them” attitude.
4. Next, ask them to consider the attitudes, thinking, people, places, and behaviors that they want to “hold on to.” These are the personal assets and positive supports that can help them to move forward. For DeAnna, she needed to hold on to her belief that she was capable of succeeding.
5. During think time, hand out plain white pieces of paper. Direct students to fold the page in half, labeling one side “Letting Go” and the other “Holding On.” Working independently, they should write a list in each category.
6. When students are done, direct them to rip the page in half down the center, separating the two sides. From this point the activity has some options to mix-and-match:
 - Students crumple up the “Letting Go” half and toss it into a basket in the middle of the circle.
 - Students share in a go-round one thing from their “Holding On” list with the group and explain how it will help them to navigate the change and reach their goal.
 - Students write a goodbye letter to an item on their “Letting Go” list (provide a model and/or starter sentences).
 - Students write a welcome letter to an item on their “Holding On” list (provide a model and/or starter sentences).
 - Students have a challenge of sharing items from the “Holding On” list with X number of supportive people in their lives outside of the group.

7. Thank students for being thoughtful members of the group and working to make connections to DeAnna's story, reflect on their own lives, and share with one another.

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?
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YCteen Essay Contest

\$150 First Prize | \$75 Second Prize | \$50 Third Prize

Enter online at bit.ly/ycwritingcontest

Describe something you've done to make a difference in your community.

It can be in your neighborhood, your circle of friends, your family, your school, or your place of worship. How did you get involved and what did you learn? How did it feel to get involved in your community this way?

Deadline: November 20, 2015

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FALL 2015 WRITING INTERNSHIP AT

Ycteen

Do you love to write personal stories and want to be a voice for teens? Then apply for our fall writing internship, which begins in early October. *Ycteen* is an award-winning, teen-written magazine that's distributed to over 200 New York City high schools and read by thousands online. *Ycteen* articles have been republished on the New York Times Learning Network and Huffington Post. Writers are mentored by a professional editor as they learn memoir-writing and journalism skills.

Our requirements are as follows:

- Writers must be between the ages of 15 and 20.
- We're open to writers from 1-6 p.m., Mon.-Thurs. Within that time frame, writers must commit to a minimum of two days a week, two hours a day (for a total of at least 4 hours per week).
- Writers must commit to participating for a minimum of 3 months.

Apply online at bit.ly/ycteenapp. Deadline: Friday, October 2. Those selected for an interview will be notified and scheduled during the week of October 5, and internships will start the week of October 12, unless you require a different start date.

While we want to take on as many writers as possible, we have a limited capacity, so if you're interested apply right away.

Questions? Contact *Ycteen* editor Holly St. Lifer at 212-279-0708 ext. 116 or hstlifer@youthcomm.org



Read. Write. Succeed.

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