Dear Educators and Counselors,

School at any age comes with its set of stressors, but high school can be particularly demanding as many students are expected to navigate between handling their classwork and thinking about their future after graduation. For many, the college application process can be particularly demanding. They are also expected to be more independent, working without adults’ constant supervision.

In this issue, you’ll find stories to help you communicate to your students that you appreciate some of what they are going through as well as provide you with a vehicle to start conversations around these pressures. The more you show your students that you care, the more they’ll be willing to work for you in your classroom. As we know, healthy relationships are foundational for academic performance. Story, topics include the downside of popularity (see lesson inside), how an IEP helps one student soar, and the stress of being pressured to get straight As. One teen writes a sophisticated opinion piece about new Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos; it’s an ideal story to provoke debate in social studies.

As usual we also have a collection of timely stories. *Nujeen* is a book review about a Syrian teen refugee’s dramatic odyssey to Germany. “Why Activism Matters Now” is an essay by a Mexican-American writer whose parents are illegal immigrants. These stories will support those students interested in becoming more politically informed and active.

Thank you for using *YCteen* with your students. We appreciate it.

Sincerely,

David Heller
Education Director

NEW WRITING CONTEST

We ask readers to write a letter to one of the writers. This will encourage close reading and writing. (See lesson inside.)
**Story to Use:** Assign a story for which students will write a letter to the writer essay.

(**Note:** If you have time, you may also hand out copies of *YCteen* to students and give them time to browse the magazine to select a story to read silently on their own. If you take this route, you will have to modify this lesson.)

**Lesson Objectives and Common Core Connections:**
- Students make personal connections to a text and successfully participate in story-based activities and discussions.
- Students increase empathy with other youths’ experiences.
- Students will initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1).
- Students will produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4).
- Students will write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence (CCS-Literacy.W.9-10.1).

**NOTE 1:** This lesson takes two class periods. In the first period, students read a story and complete Worksheet #1. In the second period, students complete Worksheet #2 to outline their letter. Then they write their letter.

**NOTE 2:** This lesson is on writing a short, persuasive essay. (Feel free to use your own persuasive writing lessons too.)

**Preparation**
1. Before class, read through *YCteen* and select a story that is engaging and appropriate for the students in your class.
2. Make one copy of the story for each student. (Alternatively, you can have students read from the printed magazine.)
3. Make one copy of both worksheets for each student.
4. Prepare the example of your prediction of the story, based on the headline.
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 called [read the title of the story you have selected].

2. Introduce the whole group brainstorming activity by explaining that students will write one sentence predicting something that the story will be about or that will occur in the story. (Remind them that we don’t know yet, but we’re going to guess from the headline.) NOTE: Before students begin writing, you should model the activity by providing an example of your own prediction.

3. After each student has written a sentence, go around the room asking for volunteers to read what they have predicted.

4. Then facilitate a brief discussion with the following questions:
   - What stands out to you about your classmates’ responses? Are students’ predictions similar, or do they vary widely? Why?

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 by repeating the headline.

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 group leader, 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: Ask students to read for moments in the text when they connect to or agree with the writer’s feelings or experiences. When this occurs in the text, students should place a “Y” (for yes!) in the margins of the story. Then ask them to read for moments when they disagree or have questions about the writer’s experiences or argument. When this occurs in the text, students should place an “N” (for no!) or a “?” for something they question or don’t understand in the margins 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 where they wrote a “Y” an “N” or a “?” and why. Or, you can pose an open question such as “What stands out to you in this section and why?”
After Reading the Story (15 min)

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

1. Introduce the **Letter to the Writer** writing activity by explaining to the group that the teen who wrote the story they just read is eager to hear responses from other teens—especially to learn what you liked about their story, but also to hear what you didn’t like, or what you thought was missing. (Remind them it’s a contest; the three best entrants—from all entries received—will win cash prizes.)

2. Tell the students they will have the opportunity to write **Letter to the Writer**, but first they will complete a worksheet to help organize their ideas.

3. Have students complete Worksheet #1.

4. Walk around the room coaching students and responding to questions while students complete the worksheet. Encourage students to help each other with ideas, when appropriate.

At the end of the class, collect the worksheets and the copies of the story (or the magazines). Make sure students put their names on the worksheets and their copy of the story.

**NEXT CLASS**

Before handing back Worksheet #1:
Welcome students to the group. Introduce today’s lesson by reminding them of the story you read in the previous class and the worksheet they completed about it. Tell them that today they will be writing a short outline for a letter to the writer. Then they will write their letter.

Students complete Worksheet #2 (20 min.)

1. Hand back Worksheet #1 and the story from the last class.
2. Hand out Worksheet #2. Review it with them so everyone knows how to complete it.

Walk around the room as students complete Worksheet #2, helping them link their examples to their main idea by asking them questions.

Students write their letter to the writer (20 min.)

1. Tell students to get out a fresh sheet of paper on which they will write their letter.
2. Start your letter with “Dear Writer” and reference the article by the title, and the writer’s name. End it with “Sincerely” and your name, address, high school, and age.
3. Congratulate the students on completing the worksheet that is an outline for their letter. Point them to the instructions at the bottom of the worksheet.
4. Walk around the room helping students who are stuck as they write their letter—especially helping them turn their “3 points” into clear sentences.
5. At the end of class, collect the student letters. Send the best ones to **YCteen**!
Worksheet #1—Organize Your Ideas

Your name____________________________________

Letter to the Writer—prep

1. Title of story: _______________________________________________________________

2. Name of writer: _____________________________________________________________

3. What is the most important point of the story to you?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

4. What are the main points the writer makes or examples the writer shows that support the
   main idea?

   Main point or example 1

   _________________________________________________________________________

   _________________________________________________________________________

   Main point or example 2

   _________________________________________________________________________

   _________________________________________________________________________

   Main point or example 3

   _________________________________________________________________________

   _________________________________________________________________________

   Other good points, or anything you thought was missing or unclear?

   _________________________________________________________________________

   _________________________________________________________________________

Do you relate to the writer’s story or argument? Why or why not?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Write the first sentence of a letter to the writer that states your main reaction to his or her story:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Worksheet #2—Outline Your Letter

Your name____________________________________

Letter to the Writer—outline

1. Repeat the first sentence of your letter from the previous worksheet (this is your main point or idea).

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

2. Give three examples that support your main idea. These can be examples from the original story. For example, if the writer made an especially good point, tell her why you thought it was so good. These can also be examples from your own life or things you know. For example, you could explain how your experiences support, or contradict, the writer’s point.

Example 1:

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Example 2:

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Example 3:

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

3. Now, write a sentence that concludes your letter. For example, you can summarize your argument. Or you can write something personal to the writer.

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

You’re almost done! Now, write your letter. You already have your first sentence and your last sentence. Write your examples as full sentences or paragraphs. Then:

1. String the whole thing together.
2. Read it aloud or have someone next to you read it.
3. Make any necessary changes in your argument or your spelling or grammar.
4. Hand it in. (The writer will be thrilled to hear from you!)
Story to Use: “The Cost of Being Popular,” by Hande Erkan, p. 4

Story Summary: After entering high school, a freshman joins up with a new clique of girls in her quest for popularity. While she enjoys the newfound attention, she also encounters the dark side and faces resistance from her family and her boyfriend, who miss the studious, responsible girl she was in middle school. After a conversation with her brother, she decides to revert back to her old lifestyle and ends her membership in the popular crowd.

Lesson Objectives and Common Core Connections:
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- Students increase empathy with other youths’ experiences.
- Students will initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1).
- Students will produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4).

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 whose newfound popularity is not what she imagined it would be like.

2. After reviewing the agenda, tell the group that they are going to do an opinion continuum activity where they move around while learning more about what they and their peers think about a topic.

3. While the group is seated, review the directions for the opinion continuum. Tell them:
   a. “On either end of the room, there are signs that read ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ ” (be sure to post these signs on blank paper before the activity begins).
   b. “I will read a statement and you will decide whether it’s true for you (agree) or not (disagree). Then you will move somewhere in between the two signs that reflects your opinion. So, if you’re unsure, you should stand somewhere in the middle.”
   c. “Once everyone has moved, I will invite volunteers to share why they chose to stand where they are.”
4. Next, ask the group to stand up and move to the center of the open space you’ve prepared.

5. Read the first statement and ask group members to move to a spot between the two signs:
   a. “Life is usually better for popular people.”

6. Once all group members have moved, ask them to notice where others are standing.

7. Ask for volunteers to share why they are standing where they are. You might want to ask at least one group member from each side of the continuum. Tell participants they may change their position if they are influenced by another’s opinion.

8. Have everyone return to the middle.

9. Repeat for the following statements:
   a. “Being popular is more important than doing well in school.”
   b. “Popular people are usually cruel to others.”
   c. “It’s OK to ditch old friends for new ones to become more popular.”
   d. “It’s sometimes worth it to lie or steal if it will help your popularity.”

10. Thank participants for sharing their opinions.

**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 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 the author mentioning a benefit of popularity, put a “+” in the margin of the story. When you notice the author mentioning a cost or the negative side of popularity, put a “-” in the margin of the story.

5. While sitting in a circle, read the story aloud together. Periodically, stop to discuss and support peer-to-peer talk and non-judgmental listening. To do this, ask for volunteers to share when they wrote + or - next to the text 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 would Hande want to be popular despite all of the consequences?
   - Does anyone connect with Hande’s story? Why?
After Reading the Story (15 min)

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

1. Introduce the Journal Jot and Pair-Share activity by explaining to the group they will be writing for 5 minutes in response to a prompt, then sharing their writing with a peer and the rest of the group.

2. Write prompt on the board: Is popularity a blessing or a curse?

3. Ask students to get out their journal or a piece of paper and use it to write their response. After 5 minutes of silent writing, ask for writers to Pair-Share by turning to a partner and sharing out what they wrote.

4. Large group debrief: Bring pairs back into the large group and ask the following questions:
   - What did you discover about yourself and/or your partner(s) during the activity?
   - What are some benefits of being popular?
   - What’s the dark side of popularity?
   - Do you think being popular is worth the cost? What costs are too great?
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?
Enter online:
bit.ly/yctcontest

Do you have a strong feeling about an article you read in the current issue of YCteen? We’d like to hear about it.

YCteen is written by a staff of teen writers who work in our New York City newsroom. But writing is a form of conversation, and we want you to join in.

We invite you to submit an essay in the form of a letter to the writer, responding to their story. This is an opportunity to express your opinion or present your own point of view on a story you’ve read.

Start your letter with “Dear Writer” and reference the article by the title and the writer’s name. End it with “Sincerely” and your name, address, high school, and age.

CONTEST RULES:

- You must be between the ages of 14 and 19.
- Your essay must respond to a story in our current issue only.
- Essays should be no more than 300 words.
- If you win, your essay will be published on our website and in our print issue. Tell us if you want it to be printed anonymously—but you should still type in your full name and complete address so we know where to mail your check if you win.
- Current YCteen or Represent writers may not enter the essay contest.
- Essays may be edited by Youth Communication editors for brevity and clarity. All entries become property of Youth Communication.

Here are some prompts to inspire you:

- What stood out to you about the story you chose?
- Can you relate to what the writer experienced? How is your own experience similar, or different?
- If you disagree with the writer, explain why you think differently or how you might have handled the situation.
- Did the story change your opinion or influence your actions?
- Are there aspects that the writer has not considered?
SUMMER WRITING WORKSHOP  
July 5 - August 11, 2017  
11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Mon – Thurs. (plus two Fridays)  
FOR NEW YORK CITY YOUTH  
AGES 15-20

IS THIS LAND YOUR LAND?
Being American has meant different things to different people over the past 241 years. The United States was inspired by ideals of freedom and equality and has been a source of hope to people all over the world. But it was also founded on slavery. What does it mean to you today? Where do you fit in? Is “American” even part of your identity? We want to know your experience.

WRITE ABOUT IT!

Be part of Youth Communication’s 38th annual intensive summer writing workshop. 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. Participate in writing lessons and group activities exploring your own story and how it fits into the American mosaic. No prior experience is required, but you must be able to attend for all six weeks. Our stories are read by thousands of people and have been republished on the New York Times Learning Network and Huffington Post. Workshop alumni have gone on to win Posse and Gates Millennium Scholarships and 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 $7 for lunch each day. (Additionally, youth in foster care will receive a $600 stipend upon successful completion of the workshop.)

APPLY ONLINE BY MAY 19, 2017  
bit.ly/ycteenwrite  
Top candidates will be contacted by June 2