Teaching ideas for the Young Writers Award

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This writing competition is a wonderful opportunity for your learners to improve their English. It is also an opportunity to take part in a contest which will build self-confidence, and allow learners to engage in an extra-curricular activity which will enhance their school experience. Writing is a complex skill, which requires thought and patience while refining a piece towards a final draft. It's always a good idea to start well ahead of the deadline to ensure that the piece has good sources of information and is a wellstructured argument.

This is a challenging task. If you are coaching learners, the following list shows the main areas for training students.

1. What makes a good piece of writing? 2. Approaches to teaching writing 3. Writing tasks 4. Marking scheme 5. Writing checklists 6. Responding to writing

1 What makes a good piece of writing?

First of all, your students need to know how writing can be evaluated, and this helps them to both write well, and to judge how they're doing. It's surprising how many students think that grammatical accuracy is the most important thing in a written text; this may be explained by the fact that teachers tend to mark this aspect of their work more than any other.

Task 1 1 Ask the students to discuss in groups what they think makes a good piece of writing. 2 Then discuss their ideas and put as many as possible on the board. You might need to add your own ideas too. Here's a mind map of an example that I did with my students.

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3 Then ask them to sort the topics on the board into 2 categories. Don't tell them at first what the categories are; just wait and see how they get on. You can start them off by putting one topic in each category.

4 Ask for feedback, and check the categories with the class. Then ask the class to give each category a name or label. See an example below.

5 Finally ask the class to say which of the 2 categories is the most important. It's important to be accurate, but the main area to focus on when writing is the content.

Content Accuracy • Impress the reader • Development of ideas • Relevance • Linking language (contributes to cohesion, and ease of reading) • Logical, clear ideas • Vocabulary (range, variety) • Introduction and conclusion • Interesting ideas • Impress the reader • Variety of sentence structure • Grammar • Linking language • Vocabulary (accuracy) • Spelling • Accurate language

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• Appropriate style • Organisation

In this way, students can see the main features of writing, and become more aware of the main concerns when writing, and also how their work will be evaluated. We'll look at the marking scheme later. 2 Approaches to teaching writing

Product Writing: Focuses on what good writers PRODUCE Emphasis on FORM and STRUCTURE of the FINISHED PRODUCT Possible Stages: 1. Analysis of a model text – use strong models at first, and later use weak models for students to evaluate and then improve. 2. Practice of features of model text – for example, you can use activities that practice writing topic sentences, or work on linkers. 3. Freer practice writing a parallel text

Process Writing: Focuses on what good writers DO Emphasis on the MEANS – the process - as well as the final PRODUCT Possible Stages: 1. Brainstorming ideas 2. Organising ideas into paragraphs 3. Writing a plan – students are not usually willing to write plans, but it's important to insist on plans. They can show the structure of a text, and whether the information is appropriate and well-sequenced. 4. First draft – students usually write this at home. They could be reassured that it can be rough (a work in progress) and that they should focus mostly on the content. Accuracy of language can be addressed at a later stage. 5. Editing and proof-reading – you may need to train students to do this, or perhaps read one another's drafts. It's much easier to see what needs to be improved when you read someone else's writing. 6. Teacher first draft feedback – this is where the teacher needs to spend quite a lot of time. Write comments on the information and paragraphing; praise good word choices and any other aspects of the text that are impressive. Use a code for indicating language errors; students can then correct themselves. Don't give a grade at this point. 7. Second draft – students should write a second draft based on your feedback. They should hand in both first and second drafts. 8. Final feedback and grade - you should be able to check the second draft quickly. Compare first and second drafts, provide corrections if the students haven't been able to, write a final positive comment, and up to 3 things to work on for the next piece of writing. Add a grade.

It's important to approach writing tasks as a process, as well as using the steps in the product approach.

The writing task

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Competitors are requested to write an opinion piece for a newspaper on one of the topics up to a maximum of 600 words. The latest topics can be found on the website. It's good to get students to take a disciplined approach to the writing task. The activities below address some of the stages of the writing process.

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Activity 1: Task Analysis

The purpose of this activity is to get students to think carefully about the task ahead. Make a task analysis sheet for each writing task your students tackle. Give students the title of the piece of writing and get them to fill in the sheet.I use the one below (filled in with the kind of answers students could write).

Text type? a newspaper opinion piece to persuade Audience? > style and level of formality newspaper readership – who exactly?Fairly formal, but not academic Content? Argumentation on the topic Length? 600 words Other considerations: • Paragraphs - organisation of information • Introduction and conclusion • Vocabulary • Grammar • Use of linking words and connectors

Activity 2: Brainstorming ideas Ask students to find images, websites and other sources, which students can bring to class and brainstorm ideas in groups. Use mind maps to note the ideas.

Activity 3: Organising paragraphs Ask students to take ideas from their brainstorming and note which paragraphs they could be used in. Again, a mind map is a good visual tool. The mind maps from activity 2 and 3 can be put up on the classroom walls for everyone to see. The class can visit each poster, and write comments and suggestions on post-it notes as feedback.

Activity 4: Using models for awareness

1 In general a) Does the writer agree or disagree with the question in the title? b) Underline the parts where the writer states his/her opinion.

2 Look at each paragraph a)What is the purpose of each paragraph? b) What is the main topic of each paragraph?

3 Topic sentences Underline the topic sentence in each paragraph.

4 Useful language a) Introductory phrases – underline phrases that could be useful in ANY argumentative writing.

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 b) Connectors – underline all the connecting words used in the answer. What meanings does each one have?

The position of women in society: Are working women to blame for more unruly youth? It is a certain fact that the position of women in society has undergone a dramatic change in the past fifty years, but I do not feel that this is a direct cause of the indisputable increase in juvenile-related crimes. It is now accepted that young women should find work on leaving school; indeed, to rely totally on their parents' financial support is no longer an option in many families. Likewise, once they get married, the majority of women continue working since the financial pressures of setting up a house and establishing a reasonable standard of living often requires two incomes. Twenty years ago, it was common for women to give up work once they had children and devote their time to caring for their children. This is no longer the general case and the provision of professionally-run child care facilities and day nurseries have removed much of the responsibility for child-rearing that used to fall to mothers. However, these facilities come at a cost and often require two salaries coming into a house to be afforded. I do not believe that the increase in the number of working mothers has resulted in children being brought up less well than previously. Indeed, it could be argued that by giving mothers the opportunity to work and earn extra money, children can be better provided for than previously. There is more money for luxuries and holidays and a more secure family life is possible. Of course, there are limits to the amount of time that ideally should be spent away from home and the ideal scenario would be for one parent to have a part-time job and thus be available for their children before and after school. It is important to establish the correct balance between family life and working life.

Activity 5: Focus on Language

Match the phrases 1-9 to the equivalent meanings in the box a) – i)

1. To provide a context for this discussion, ... 2. First and foremost, ... 3. Secondly, ... 4. Moreover, ... 5. Additionally, ... 6. To counterbalance this viewpoint, ... 7. In the final analysis, ... 8. My own personal opinion is that ... 9. Conversely, ...

Activity 6: Using models to make a plan

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a) Ultimately… b) On the other hand … c) Furthermore … d) The opposing point of view is … e) In addition to this …

Use the essay above to analyse the information structure. Students can fill in the table with notes.

Purpose Topic sentence Details

Paragraph 1

To introduce topic State opinion

(Thesis statement)

Paragraph 2

Present argument 1 It is now accepted that young women should find work on leaving school

Question of finance Standard of living today Need for 2 incomes

Paragraph 3

Present argument 2 Twenty years ago, it was common for women to give up work

Child care facilities

Paragraph 4

Summarise and persuade

I do not believe that the increase in the number of working mothers has resulted in children being brought up less well than previously.

Mothers earn extra money – better life for children Importance of balance

Activity 7: Collaborative Writing After planning, get students to write in groups, each taking a section or two of the essay. They can then compare and revise. Alternatively, use an Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) or projector to display writing, and get students to revise and evaluate with the judges' mark sheet.

Activity 8

Ask students to read a sample essay and mark it according to the judge's mark sheet.

Sample essay

Participant Amanda Geenen School Het Assink Lyceum, Haaksbergen Topic Is social networking anti-social? Title Thumbs up for social networks!   Text 'Thinking of Holland I picture broad rivers meandering through unending lowland', Dutch poet Hendrik Marsman wrote in his poem 'Memory of Holland'. The Dutch have a very peculiar obsession with everything water-related indeed, which might be justified by the fact half of our country's

surface lies well beneath sea-level. Only one thing intrigues us even more: ice. On February 8th, the entire eight O'clock news was devoted to a press conference about a possible Elfstedentocht. The gabble of some Frisian gentlemen was considered more important than a violent coup d'état taking place in the Maldives at the same time. I only learned about this coup through my Maldivian friend Azka's 7

harrowing Facebook status updates, and it was Facebook that enabled me to condemn this gross violation of human rights and sympathize with people over 6000 miles away. That night is only one of many reasons I believe social networks are incredibly social indeed.

Granted, I am not completely unbiased. Social networks make up a huge chunk of my social life. I attended summer camps in Sweden and Germany and I love travelling - activities resulting in numerous international friendships. Last time I counted, I had Facebook friends in 35 countries in five continents. If we are to believe the makers of the movie 'The Social Network', Facebook was born out of frustration of a dorky Harvard student. Who could've imagined that just eight years later, this network created by a socially awkward geek would have over 845 billion users? A single mouse click is all it takes to get in touch with my friends, and the world population for that matter: According to research recently carried out by Cornell University, at least 99.91% of Facebook users are interconnected.

I honestly can't think of a single reason people would call social networking anti-social. True, today's teenagers communicate in different ways from their parents. They do spend a lot of time in front of screens updating multiple social network accounts. Are we risking losing an entire generation to cyber mania? I don't think so. Luckily, today's teenagers are extremely good at multitasking. On my bus to school, I witness teens sending tweets, playing a game on their Smart phones and chatting to each , all at the same time... Frankly, I don't think we'll ever top this level of über-socialness.

I feel blessed with the existence of social networks, for without them I wouldn't have met many amazing people. I'm perfectly aware some say social networking is just a waste of time, a shallow substitute for real interaction. I refuse to agree. My window on the world would have been this tiny without Facebook. Somehow watching seemingly trivial photos of my friend in her funny Papua costume and my Swedish host family taking a sauna taught me more about the world than my schoolbooks ever did. It's funny but true: just seeing people going about their daily lives on the other side of the world makes us aware of our own humanity.

Without wanting to sound naive, I believe social networks can really connect all of us, linking the Inuit boy in Greenland to Lady Gaga and everyone in between. I also think much of the opposition to social networks originates from fear for the unknown. We shouldn't be that intimidated. The Dutch have adventurously roamed the oceans ever since the Golden Age. Don't we like a challenge? The time has come to embrace new technologies and start navigating on these digital rivers called social networks. Meandering through cyberspace, they will lead us to endless opportunities.

Word count 604

Marking scheme Relevance to title maximum 10

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Structure and content maximum 30 Originality maximum 30 Style maximum 15 Language - Use of English maximum 15 Total number of points maximum 100

Judge's marksheet 1. Relevance to title (max 10 marks) • 1-8 words • catchy • indicates the direction of the text 2. Structure and Content (max 30 marks) • Introduction: catchy scene setting, main points, thesis statement • Body paragraphs: relevant to one aspect of TH, TO, focus • Conclusion: sum up MPs, restate TH, good final sentence TH = Thesis Statement; TO = Topic Statement; MP = Main Point 3. Originality (max 30 marks) • Convincing supportive material • Appealing examples • Surprising twists 4. Style (max 15 marks) • No abrupt changes • Varied sentence length & vocabulary • Present, precise & active 5. Language - Use of English (max 15 marks) • No grammatical errors • No vocabulary errors • No spelling errors

I hope you and your students enjoy the process and may they go far!

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Judy Copage has been involved in ELT since 1977 and worked in the UK, Portugal, the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia and Greece before returning to the UK in 2000. From 2010 - 2013, she was an International Teacher Trainer at Pearson. Before that she was Head of EFL and a Senior Lecturer in Linguistics and TESOL undergraduate and postgraduate courses at the University of Wolverhampton in the UK.

She now works as a freelance trainer, writer and consultant as director of Copage Educational Services, both in the UK and internationally. She is a keynote speaker at TESOL and EFL conferences, providing both academic plenary talks and practical workshops and seminars. She is also an author of student EFL materials and teaching methodology resources.

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