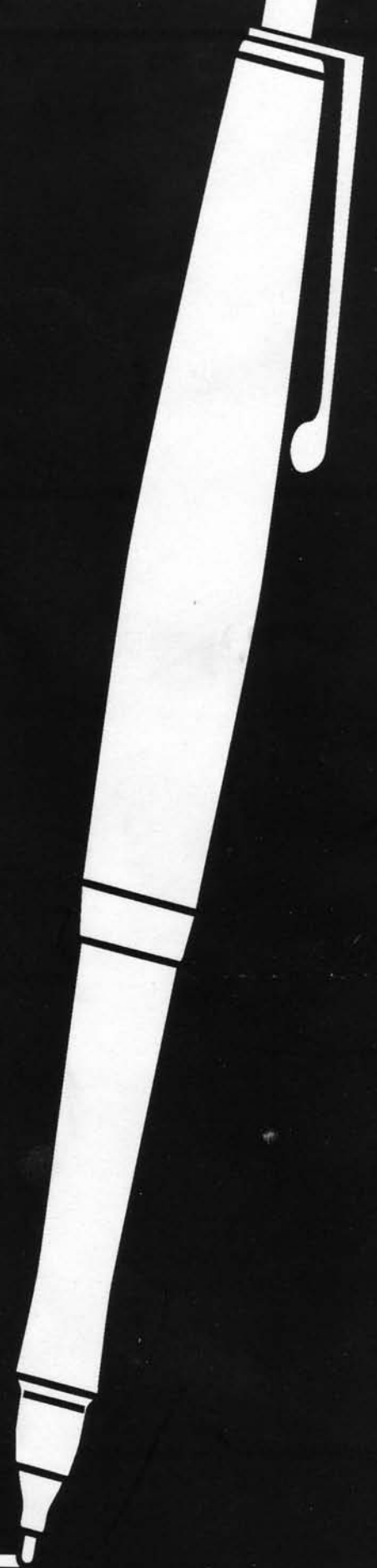


*101 Ideas  
Kids Can  
Write  
About*



A Supplemental Notebook of Writing Ideas for the Intermediate and Middle School Student

# An Open Letter

Dear Teacher:

All writers need fresh ideas to help them get started with a new story, article, poem, etc. This is especially true when we are young, and first discovering “how to write.”

Over the years, we’ve worked with thousands of students and their teachers to develop story ideas that kids LIKE to write about. We’ve compiled some of our favorites into this book—*101 Ideas Kids Can Write About*.

We invite teachers to use this book as a resource for individual student writing projects, or as a springboard for larger cooperative publishing projects. Some teachers even use the assignments in this book to introduce students to desktop publishing, helping them start their own school newspaper or youth-oriented magazine from the stories they write.

We are always interested in hearing about the new and different ways teachers use *101 Ideas Kids Can Write About* as a classroom tool. Please write and let us know what you think. Thanks, and KEEP ON WRITING!

*Write to: QUALITY COMMUNICATION • 280 Cheese Factory Rd., Honeoye Falls, NY 14472 • (716) 624-9567.*

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# *Your World*

**Some of the Things  
That Make Up Your World**



# WHAT IS “YOUTH CULTURE” ANYWAY????????????????????

Young people have customs and ideas that are different from other age groups. We call this Youth Culture. For an example, imagine that you and your friends belong to a “tribe.” You’ve probably seen tribes on TV. There are tribes in Africa, and there are tribes of Indians still active in our own country. Well, young people belong to tribes too. They have rituals all their own—take the fashion craze and the popularity of heavy metal music, for instance.

- Write about the youth culture today. This is a very creative assignment because there are really hundreds of ways you could approach it. One theme you might want to concentrate on is Culture and School. What are some of the rituals that young people participate in in school, and why do you think they do these things? For example, Why do kids write notes back and forth during class? What purpose does a food fight serve? Why do kids chew gum in class or play the class clown when they know it will lead to trouble? These things are all rituals that kids accept as “normal” in their culture—but adults see things differently.

- Perhaps you could narrow the assignment down. Do you and your friends write notes back and forth? You

could write down on paper a typical day of writing notes to your friends. What do you find to write about day after day? Why during class?

- Interview your classmates about what they see as the most often seen “youth rituals.” Make up a list of the ones most often mentioned. Interview your teachers on the subject and get their point of view.

This is your chance to let the other side know why kids go to such lengths to break THE rules. Perhaps it is part of your tribal ritual . . .

*Dear Janey,*

*Did you see the way Tanyia looked today? It was totally gross. Her hair was all messed up, and she didn't even have any makeup on. I wonder what's wrong with her. John probably broke up with her. I heard he wants to go out with Carol. I think Carol is prettier anyway. But she is kind of a snob, don't you think?*

*Check out Mrs. Kominski's outfit. Does that look like something right out of the 1950s or what? She dresses stranger every day. I heard she has a really cute son in college. Did you know that? Sue Jamison saw them at the store and Mrs. Kominski introduced her to her son. Sue said he's really cute. Must not take after his Mom! Ha, Ha. Write back,*

*Vanessa*

# WHY ARE YOU SHY

A recent newspaper article declared, "Shyness is America's most common social problem." The article goes on to cite examples of how shy people lose out on job opportunities and promotions, and may even become physically ill when faced with social situations that make them uncomfortable.

Are you shy? Explain to others who may not suffer from shyness what it is like to be shy. Does shyness make you behave differently from others? When did you first realize you had a problem with shyness? Why do you think some people are shy and others aren't? What tips do you have for overcoming shyness?

Some steps to beating shyness might be to build your self-confidence by preparing yourself before talking to others, by watching others who are more comfortable in social situations and learning from them, and by talking to new people and becoming more adept at the art of conversation.

What tips do you have for overcoming shyness?



# Gossip and Rumors:

## The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly

A recent article in *USA Today* heralded Gossip as a necessary evil—as a way for teens to define their values. The article says, “Gossip may be judgmental, mean-spirited, or just good fun, but when adolescents do it, it helps establish values... For example, somebody may say that a girl is a flirt, but in the process, they’ll clarify what (they think) a flirt is... We’re finding gossip is a way that peers use to help clarify their own values and norms.”

Maybe so, but anyone who’s been the subject of gossip or rumors might suggest that these quick-tongued “gossipers” find another way to clarify their values.

The article goes on to note research findings about adolescents and gossip:

- Girls tend to focus on others’ appearance and behavior.
- Boys gossip more about achievements, like who’s better in sports.
- On the whole, boys give more face-to-face insults while girls tend to gossip more.

What do you think?

Do you agree with this article—that gossip and rumors aren’t so bad after all? If so, why do you think kids gossip and spread rumors? Have you ever gossiped? How does it make you feel to be in on a rumor that’s going around school? How do these things get started? Are they usually based on fact, or just on speculation? How do they end? What is the most interesting gossip or rumor going around your school right now? Do you think the *USA Today* article is right about gossip helping kids define values? If so, explain how this works.

If you’ve ever been the brunt of unkind words, now’s your chance to speak up. What do you think about gossip and rumors? What do they do to your self-image? How does it make you feel when you hear something you know is untrue? How do you finally resolve a situation like this? What advice would you give to other teenagers who are being gossiped about? Can you give them Ten Tips to Kill a Rumor?

Although gossip and rumors can be devastating sometimes, they can also, at times, be absurd—so absurd they are funny. Have you heard some of these obviously silly and false rumors flying around? Keep a journal of the silly gossip and rumors you hear going around school. Try to catch pieces of conversations and write them down. Follow a rumor from its start to finish. Play the part of a researcher, and track down how rumors and gossip spread.

Interview classmates about their opinions on gossip. Is the *USA Today* article right in its conclusion that boys and girls spread gossip differently? What do you and your friends think?

# What DO You Really Think About...

Adults tend to listen to what other adults say about kids. This is your chance to tell everyone what kids really think about...

*Your world...* What do you think about the world you live in? Are you encouraged by what you see, hear, and learn, or are you concerned about the world and its future? Give us a teen-eyed look at the world.

*Your parents...* Much of the time parents hear only "Can I?" "Why not?" and "But" from their children. They rarely hear, "Mom, Dad, you're doing a great job as a parent. I'm glad I'm your kid." Why don't more kids tell their parents they appreciate them?

Probably because the teenage years are a struggle. Teenagers struggle in school, battle their emotions, and worry about relationships with their peers. Parents get caught in the crossfire, and are often seen by their teenage sons and daughters as the

"enemy." Here's your chance to tell parents everywhere how you

really feel—to let them know that a lot of what you say isn't what you mean.

*Your education...* "I hate school." "Don't make me go." "I don't feel good today." Ask parents, and these are only some of the excuses they say their children have come up with to avoid school. All of us have said these things at one time or another, but is that the way kids really feel about school? You know that most kids really like school. They like learning, they like many of their teachers, and they like seeing their friends every day. Now's the time for you to tell the rest of the world how kids really feel about school.

# THE BUM RAP

## Good News About Teens

Read the newspapers, listen to adults talk, watch TV, and you'll most likely hear what the rest of the world thinks about teenagers. Young people are getting a bum rap. The news is full of all the bad things about kids and not enough of the positive things.

You may be all too familiar with how the adult world sees teenagers, but how do you see yourself? What is it like being a teenager? How does it feel hearing the things people say about kids that you know aren't all true? Why do you think adults sometimes get the wrong impression about you? What are you really like? Are you typical of most teenagers?

Write about some of the *good* news about teenagers. Write about the positive activities or causes you and your friends are involved in and publicize your accomplishments. What are kids in your school doing to help others in your community? What is the best thing a teenager in your school has done recently?

It's time to put an end to the bum rap. Write a story featuring the good news about young people.



# Big Wheels Keep on Turning...

## GOING PLACES

It's not always easy for kids to get around town. Some depend on parents or older brothers and sisters for rides; others have different ideas. Student writer Pedro Melendez used to spend a lot of time walking from place to place, until he met her:

"I went to a lot of bike shops looking for a bike, but couldn't find anything I liked. My brother suggested I go to Toys R Us. I laughed and told him that if bike shops didn't have what I wanted, how could a toy store? I was wrong. I got to Toys R Us, went straight to the bikes and there she was. She was just sitting there, sparkling in the store's light. I walked up to her as if she were calling my name. I looked her over, studying every little detail, knowing that she was the one I wanted..."

If you have had trouble getting around town in the past but have found a unique solution, write about it.

Have you or any of your friends recently bought your first car? Tell us about your experience. Where was the first place you drove? Who was with you? What did it feel like? Was it all you thought it would be? What advice do you have for other teens who may soon be in your position?

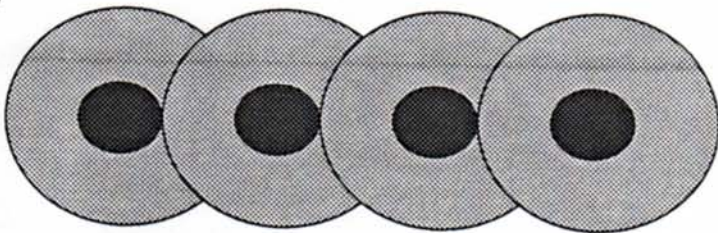
Maybe you're not old enough to get your own car, or maybe your parents won't let you. We have seen a lot of kids skateboarding around town—your readers would love to learn more about it.

Are you a dirtbike, motorcycle or all-terrain vehicle owner? How did you first get involved? What do you do to

calm the fears of parents or friends who say these bikes are dangerous? Do you think they are dangerous? What precautions do you take? What advice do you have for others who may want to buy one of these bikes, or get into motorcycle racing as a sport?

### ***Spinning Wheel's Got to Go 'Round...***

**Our love for things that spin doesn't necessarily end with transportation. What about every kid's dream of riding the ferris wheel, our fears of racing down the rails in a roller coaster, or our fascination with watching model trains go 'round tiny tracks? If you're interested, pick one of these attractions and explore it in an article. If you're a photographer, try capturing these worlds on film.**



# The Green-Eyed Monster



Kimberly Heauer writes, "A person with low self-esteem doesn't believe in himself. He can't trust anyone because he can't trust his own judgment. A lack of trust is one reason why people are jealous. They don't trust their companion with anyone else. They are jealous of anyone who interferes."

Christina Orlando felt this kind of jealousy when her boyfriend began studying for the S.A.T. exams with his ex-girlfriend. Although Christina knew that this other girl was very smart and a good tutor, the situation still bothered her. She wrote, "He never even asked if I would study with him. I just felt so low inside. It was a feeling like I wasn't good enough or smart enough for him."

Have you ever felt jealous? What specific incident in your life brought out this green-eyed monster? Who was involved? How did you feel? How did your jealous feelings make you act? Were you proud of your behavior or do you regret your actions? How did you finally resolve the situation? What advice would you give others who might find themselves in the same situation? What are your ten tips to avoiding jealousy?

Is envy the same as jealousy? By definition, envy is slightly different from jealousy, although both emotions may make you act in similar ways. Jealousy usually rears its ugly head when we feel threatened—when someone we care about is in danger of being taken away, for example. Envy, on the other hand, is an emotion we feel when we think someone else is better than us, or has something that we wish we had, or looks prettier or more handsome than we do.

How do you see jealousy and envy? You may want to write an essay comparing and contrasting jealousy and envy. Interview your classmates and get specific examples of times in their lives when they felt jealous. Then, in another column, write down experiences your friends have had with envy.

Talk to teachers and parents. Have they ever felt jealous or envious? Get their advice on how they cope with these feelings. What advice do they have for teens?

# TEEN POINT OF VIEW

*Some adults ignore the opinions of young people when it comes to current events, but many young people have very strong opinions about what's going on in the world today—and some kids have a lot of good ideas on how to solve problems.*

*If current events interest you, write a letter to the President of the United States, telling him about the biggest concerns you have for the young people of this country. If you have ideas on how to solve these problems—and how to help all kids feel good about themselves—give the President your input and ideas. Tell him that your school is putting together its own publication. Ask the President to write back to you and tell you how he thinks young people can stay on the right track. Or, you might ask him what made him feel good about himself when he was in school.*

*Read the newspaper and pick a current topic of interest to you. Examine it from a "kid's-eye-view" and let the adults in your community know what you think should be done about the issue. Remember, your point of view counts!*

# HIDEOUTS AND HANGOUTS

## Hideouts and Hangouts

**My place is a mystery  
A wonder in time,  
Created by magic,  
About the size of a dime,  
Far different than earth,  
A dimension in space...  
by Erin Collins**

Most of us have a special place, a place that makes us feel comfortable, at peace with ourselves, or maybe just safe. For some, like student Kati Rohtla, it's the outdoors: "When I want to get away from things, I go down to the bay," she writes.

Where do you go when you want to be alone, get in

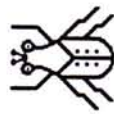
touch with yourself, and think about things? Do you lock yourself in your room? Take a walk? Blast your stereo? Read or write? What kinds of things make you want to retreat to your special place? And why do you think you've chosen this place as your retreat from the world?

If you're the kind of person who escapes life's pressures by being social, where do you go? Do you and your friends "hang out" together? What happens when you all get together to hang out? What kind of things do you talk about? How do your parents react to your hanging out? Do you feel better after being with friends? If so, in what ways?

If you're an artist or a photographer, try to capture your special hangout or hideout visually for your readers.

## What are YOUR Hideouts and Hangouts?

# The Cartooning Story



*"It was a long time ago, but I remember it vividly," writes teen cartoonist Joseph Keyes. "I was sitting in my fourth grade classroom just thinking away the hours. The teacher was rambling on about math. Totally boring. I glanced down at my paper and began to draw. That's when it happened. I invented HIM. I leaned over and tapped my friend on the shoulder. 'What should I name him?' I asked Danny. 'I don't know,' he said. 'How about Domonic?'*

*"That's it,' I agreed. 'Domonic Idiotic!'*

*"After that, everywhere I went people asked me, 'Joe, how's Domonic?' or 'What's happening with Dom?'"*

Through his cartoons, Joseph Keyes has found a way to get rid of boredom, and, at the same time, entertain his friends and classmates with his creativity. Do you doodle or like to draw cartoons? If you're often caught drawing in class, this article idea is for you. Write a story about how and why you started drawing your characters, and draw some samples of your work.

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# Romeo!

# Oh, Romeo!

Teen romance: why is it such a big deal? Student Bonnie Brody writes this about relationships:

*“Americans have always worked toward gaining independence. We no longer want to be classified as black, white, man, woman. Now we want to be known for who we are as individuals—Sean, Carrie, Natach, MiLian, Seiya.*

*“Now that we have gained more freedom, we seem to need something to hold on to. We need someone to love us. Without a boyfriend or girlfriend, we feel unloved; we don’t believe in ourselves. But how far are we willing to go to find that special someone? And what if it never happens?”*

What are your ideas about love and relationships today? How important is it to be part of a couple? Are you looked at differently by peers if you don’t have a girlfriend/boyfriend? What exactly is *teen love*, and how important is it to teens today? What do the words “relationship” and “love” mean to teenagers? What role do parents play in teen love? Are they supportive of your relationships, or are they like the parents in *Romeo and Juliet*?

What are your views on teens and love?

# Cliques do they rule your school?

Cliques. Almost every school has them. They're the kids who hang out together and never let any new kids into the group unless they dress, act, and look the exact same as everyone else in the group. Student Sandy Nagar writes:

*"You walk in. The walls seem higher than ever. It's a cement hole that pulls you in farther and farther each day. It is SCHOOL!"*



*"Cliques play an important part in the life of the high school student. Everyone wants to belong to the right one—but*

*the right clique depends on who you are. There are so many cliques, but if you're not in the RIGHT one, it can make school very difficult for you..."*

Are there cliques in your school? What are they like? Write about the cliques in your school as if you were describing them to someone from a foreign country who had never heard of such a thing before. Be vivid in your descriptions.

Are you part of a clique? If so, why? Why is belonging to a group so important to kids? How do you view kids who don't belong to cliques? Are there confrontations among the various cliques? Which cliques are considered to be the coolest?

# Moving On: The New School

Going to a new school is never easy. Worries plague you for months before that terrifying first day. It's something every teenager has to deal with eventually.

Write about what it's like to change schools. Is the transition from middle school to high school, or from high school to college, as difficult as moving to an entirely new town in an entirely different school district? For student reporter Jodi Grega, these are some of the things "The New School" brings to mind:

*"Feelings, change, attitudes, differences, leaving behind a lot, getting up earlier, different rules, buses, friends, teachers, the memories, harder work, new relationships..."*

Take one or two of Jodi's "New School feelings" and write about how you've handled them. Draw from your own experiences if you've changed schools, or describe your fears and hopes if you'll be changing schools soon.

Give readers advice on how to handle the change, and on how to fit in more easily. What should they expect? What should they find out in advance? What is worth worrying about, and what isn't? What are the do's and don'ts of Moving On to the New School?



# TEENS AND WORK

Does this sound familiar to you?

*Two or three days a week during the school year, 17-year-old Meta Smith headed directly from class to Mr. G's supermarket... From 3 to 8 p.m., she bagged groceries, rang up sales and served cold cuts in the store's deli. Then she headed home for a night of homework before jumping into bed—and waking up at 6 the next morning to begin the routine anew. Her motivation: m-o-n-e-y. Most weeks, Meta earned about \$90, which she used to buy makeup, clothes, jewelry and lunches. She says, "So far it's the best job I've had."*

Although Meta Smith lives in Chicago, her daily routine, as reported in *Newsweek*, may ring a familiar bell for teenagers everywhere. Do you have a job? Where do you work and what are your responsibilities? Do you save the money you earn? If not, what do you spend the money on?

Some people think that teenagers should have jobs. They say it teaches responsibility and prepares kids for the future. Others

say that teenagers have enough to worry about without the added pressures of a job. They maintain that school should be a young person's job, and that they should be dedicated and responsible to their studies. How do you feel? Do you think it is good for teens to work? Or, do you think schoolwork suffers when kids take jobs? What are some of the pros and cons of having a job, and how do you think working affects kids?

If you have a job, write about some of the interesting or unusual things that have happened to you at work. Describe your workplace and the people you work with. Tell what a typical day on the job with you is like.

## **Tips for Getting the Job You Want**

**Some teenagers would like to work, but are unsure of how to get the job they want. If you have a job, or have worked in the past, give your readers tips on how to get a job. How did you find a job? What did you have to do to get the job? What should kids know before going on a job interview or filling out a job application? What are your sure-fire tips for getting the job you want?**

**Interview a career counselor in your school or community. Get information from them about teens and work. Ask for their expertise on how kids can get jobs and on how to be prepared for an interview. Get their ten most important DOs and DON'Ts for getting the job you want.**

# NOTE WRITING IS HEALTHY

You have probably heard the complaint that students today don't write enough. Parents will tell you that when they were in school there was a big emphasis on writing, and everyone learned how to spell. One thing parents and teachers may not know, however, is that kids today may be writing even more than they did. Why don't adults see this writing? Because today, more kids are writing notes to each other. Here's your chance to defend the practice of note writing.

Write an essay that depicts note writing as a positive activity. What do you talk about in your notes to friends? How does writing and receiving notes make you feel? Can positive things come out of note writing? Have you ever helped a friend solve a problem in a note, or stopped a friend from doing something dangerous with the persuasion of your pen? If you have samples of notes that emphasize the positive things that go on between friends writing notes, make a collage of your notes.

*"When I write a note to my friend Sarah, I feel so much better. Whatever I say, I know she will understand. You can put things in a note to a friend that you could never say out loud. Writing notes lets us express ourselves."*



# What Do You Value?

Student writer Erica K. Andersen said this about teen values:

*"The teen years are the most important years for developing morals and values. What role do parents, teachers, and peers hold in forming our values?"*

Our values are a big part of who we are. They mold our behavior and our way of thinking. But who is responsible for helping to shape your values? Tell about a specific incident where your values have come into play, or tell us, in general, about the people who have most helped you develop your values and morals. Perhaps a certain teacher taught you a valuable lesson about life, or maybe your parents have raised you to act certain ways in certain situations.

Survey your classmates and friends to find out what kids think the most important values are. Then survey some teachers and parents to find out what qualities they value most in a person. Do you find that the value systems of kids and adults differ? If so, why do you think they are?

Think about your own values, and then write an article.



*What do you value  
in YOUR world?*



# I Can't Drive 55: Street Racing in Your Town

Student Brian Bess writes:

*"For as long as cars have been around, there has been a street-racing epidemic. The age-old desire to have the "baddest car on the block" is still growing today. On Long Island, the problem has become severe since the closing of the New York National Speedway in 1979. Now, one of our more popular street-racing havens is Route 238 and Deer Park Avenue in Babylon.*

*"But before you go out and race the family car, there is one thing you*

*should know: Street racing is ILLEGAL! If you are caught racing, your license will be immediately revoked. You should also know that street racing is second only to drunk driving in causing teenage fatalities."*

What do you know about street racing? Do you know kids who participate? How widespread is the problem? Why do kids continue to race cars when they know the severe danger and punishments that go along with this "fad of the past"?

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# Overcoming Boredom: What to Do This Summer

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The sun is out. The weather is super. It smells like only summer smells. You've got on your favorite pair of cut-offs and your most comfortable T-shirt. There's no school. Everything is absolutely *perfect*—except for one thing. **THERE'S NOTHING TO DO!!!!**

You think you'll go out of your mind if you have to listen to your mother tell you to clean your room one more time, if your little sister follows you into your room one more time, if the phone rings and it's not for you *one more time!!!!*

So, what do you do? Find **SOMETHING** to do. Student writer Kelly Barton says this about summer vacation:

*"There are a lot of fun places to spend time during your vacation. You could take a family vacation, a vacation with your friends, or just go off by yourself somewhere to be alone and enjoy the quiet. No matter where you're headed, you want to have a good time. That's what summer is for..."*

Do some research—or use your own personal experiences—and give your readers some ideas about where to go for fun this summer. Tell readers what they can do to fill the summer with fun and make the best of being out of school.



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# FASHION

## Trends that Never End...

Are you caught up in the latest fashion fads? Do you notice certain trends taking hold in your school? Being in fashion, in style, can make us feel good about ourselves... It can also be *expensive*. What are your views on fashion and the newest clothes and accessories in your school? Are kids crazy to spend \$50 on a pair of designer jeans? Or do you think it's only normal to spend a whole month's allowance on one pair of sneakers? Write an essay on fashion trends, or survey your classmates to find out what's "in" and what's "out."

Try to go beyond just making lists of the latest trends. If you want to write on this topic, really give it some thought. Dig deep into WHY fashion is so important to kids, and how far they will go to wear what's "in."

Interesting essays might focus on what you had to do to talk your mom into buying your first pair of Reeboks. What's the funniest thing your best friend has done just to get a new pair of the latest fashion jeans? What kinds of deals do kids make with parents so that they can wear some of these outlandish popular clothes or hairstyles? What would your school be like if every student dressed in the most fashionable, most expensive clothes on the market? How would it make you feel? Does it ever become "unfashionable" to dress like you just walked off a magazine cover?

What do the guys in your school think of being in fashion? Will they admit they are just as clothes crazy as the girls? Focus on one of these areas, and cover what's NEWS in fashion for kids today!