



## COMPETITION RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

Dear Teachers,

Welcome to the 2022-2023 competition cycle at Write the World! We're happy to have you here in this community. Along with thousands of young writers (ages 13-18) from around the world, your students are invited to draft, peer review, and publish submissions for our competitions, each of which explores a unique genre.

We've created these educator resources to help you seamlessly incorporate our competitions into your coursework. Here are some tips to help you get started:

- There are several activities for each competition; feel free to choose from our suggestions or add your own ideas.
- Within this curriculum, we've written the text as if addressing your students themselves—the activities are ready for you to share in a learning management system, project in the classroom, or turn into an assignment.
- We offer private classroom groups in which you can use our prompts or these competition resources at any time of the year. Peer reviews and free writing are also available. [Request a group](#) to begin your class's writing space on Write the World.
- We recognize that you may need to tailor our suggested activities to suit the needs of your students and classroom environment. Please let us know if we can do anything in the future to better serve your class.

If you have requests or questions regarding these competition resources for educators, or if you require more information about using Write the World in your learning community, please reach out to our teacher liaison, Lori Pelliccia, at [Lori@WritetheWorld.org](mailto:Lori@WritetheWorld.org).

Thank you for your participation in Write the World's 2022-2023 competitions.  
Let's get writing!

Sincerely,  
The Write the World team

Hello teachers and educators,

My name is Tula Singer, and I am an 18-year-old Cuban-American writer currently interning at Write the World after finishing my first year of college at Northeastern University. I first started using Write the World as a young teenager living in Havana. In my city and school, I didn't have teachers/peers to give me notes on my writing, prompts to inspire ideas, or contests to test my notions of literary style, voice, and story-telling. What is a writer without these challenges?

The Write the World competitions were the first to begin exposing me to the processes of writing, editing, and submitting in a warm, solid, yet vast community of writers my age. I didn't have to win to feel supported or to feel like I'd benefited from the competition process. When I won the Flash Fiction Competition of 2020 with my piece "[Flor africana](#)", I was interviewed, honored with an award, and recognized on the blog/website. Yet I also felt like Write the World was doing everything possible to use what I had accomplished as a resource for other young writers who hadn't gotten there yet. Winners are distinguished and applauded not to make other writers feel discouraged or disappointed, but to help them improve their own writing and make it the best possible.

I really appreciated the creativity of the monthly themes, as well as how restricting yet flexible they are. Within a very short amount of time, competitors have to write, edit, peer review, and polish their submissions, while still sticking to basic genre conventions and a word limit; even then, the way you can approach each prompt is very malleable and depends on personal interest. The guidelines were strict enough that they challenged writers while still enabling them to convey personal stories in their own voice.

The most valuable part about participating in these competitions and being a part of Write the World in general is feeling like we really are writing the world, and not a world dominated by Western culture or the United States. All communities are represented and valued equally in these competitions and in the writing produced. As a person who is half Cuban, half American, I've never belonged to a place before, but at Write the World, I felt utterly welcomed in a community where I could write about my own mixed culture without being nationally or ethnically classified. On Write the World, I'm not from a place, I am myself.

Thank you,  
Tula Singer

## Getting Started

### *Creating a Writing Culture in the Classroom*

Our monthly writing competitions are one way to make writing (in a variety of genres) part of your course curriculum. We hope Write the World's global platform, creative prompts, private classroom groups, peer reviews, and monthly competitions will help promote a culture of writing in your classroom. Belonging to a writing community, as opposed to a class that includes writing assignments, creates more buy-in, participation, and joy in the writing process. (Ralph Fletcher discusses the importance of low-stakes writing and creating a writing flow in his book [Joy Write](#).) Please read on to see how daily writing prompts, prewriting tools, sharing student work, and author reflections can help to create a culture of writing in every classroom.

### *Daily Writing Prompts*

When every class begins with a writing prompt, the familiarity of this activity brings everyone together into the calm, focused mindset required for working together. It also emphasizes that writing and sharing ideas are the basis of your class. Of course, these are skills that can enrich any subject area—we invite teachers of all subject areas to try daily writing prompts to support metacognition, content acquisition, and social-emotional learning! (Read more about the value of short writing assignments in [Edutopia](#).)

Additionally, opening “quick writes” are a great way to create space and time for pre-assessments or formative assessments throughout the progression of a unit, creating opportunities to gauge students’ prior knowledge, learn about their passions, and boost intrinsic motivation by connecting those passions to curricular content.

Here are our tips for getting the most from Daily Writing Prompts:

- *Mix up the types of prompts*  
Have your students respond to a one-line prompt daily; keep it simple so it's not a burden to think of new prompts. Some prompts might introduce a theme that will become evident in the piece of literature you're studying; others might relate to a reading from the night before or to a current event in the news. Varying the prompts, and how (or if) they connect to your curriculum, means that the act of writing and the ideas students share have value on their own, even aside from the main goal of that day's lesson. Similar to our monthly “Grab Bag” prompt (available on our [“Start Writing”](#) page), you might ask your students to submit prompt ideas that you can intersperse with prompts of your own creation.
- *Always leave time for sharing two responses aloud*  
Setting the expectation that two people will share their responses aloud each day accomplishes a few things: It creates an environment where sharing your work is the norm, helping to translate this practice to longer assignments; it encourages all students to speak up as everyone shares over the course of a month; and it limits the number of “shares,” keeping some level of novelty to the

practice—and not overwhelming your allotted class time. You might rotate who shares rather than asking for volunteers to ensure that all students develop their sharing voice.

- *Write when the students write*

This is an opportunity to be present in the moment and to resist taking care of other responsibilities. When everyone in the room writes together, it's a physical reminder that this is something the community values and is important enough to warrant five minutes of attention—even if it's only reflecting on the day's weather or a poem that was assigned for homework. (Read Penny Kittle's thoughts on teachers as writers in [“On Joy, Teaching, and the Deep Satisfaction of Writing.”](#))

- *Provide opportunities for revisiting entries*

The school year can become its own time warp: the same routine day after day, week after week, leads to months passing in a flash. When students have the opportunity to polish something they wrote earlier in the year, they can reflect on how they have developed as writers, or how their thinking on a particular subject has evolved, promoting metacognition. Research shows that the most effective learning environments make, not only content, but the very process of learning visible ([Tomlinson & Moon 2013](#); [Morrison, Church & Ritchhart 2011](#)); in other words, students may be exploring symbolism in *Hamlet* during ELA or catalysis during science, but they are also, equally and explicitly, thinking about thinking—and learning, inquiry, knowledge building, etc. Asking students to revisit an entry and reflect on whether/how their thinking has changed, and why, promotes this powerful practice.

- *Keep it brief*

Prompts should be short and easy to understand so there's no extra time spent on instructions. Further, as tempting as it is to allow students to continue writing when the whole class is engaged and even asking for more time, it's important to set a time limit and to stick to it. This allows those five minutes to remain sacred—and not something that needs to be cut from the class period because it turns into ten or fifteen minutes in practice. For more on the value of time-limited free writes, you might explore the books and resources of author and writing scholar [Natalie Goldberg](#).

- *Embrace humor*

Some students might choose to write a funny response to a prompt and read it aloud. Rather than seeing these responses as derailing the activity, allow the humor to be enjoyed...before nudging everyone back on course and toward the next part of the lesson.

- *Demonstrate kindness, and also neutrality*

When a student shares a response, model for your class how to respond with kind, specific compliments on the writing or an idea the writer expressed. At the same time, consider keeping a casual tone and general level of neutrality as you respond to each piece, so that writers do not feel they need to compete with each other for your reactions to their work.

- *Share your own writing on occasion*

To further emphasize this idea of your class as a writing community, share your writing on occasion. Also, consider sharing what you find enjoyable or challenging about writing, or your favorite practices for revising your work—anything that shows that you are always evolving as a writer, just as your students are, too! The practice of modeling our own curiosities, processes, and creativity aligns with inquiry-based learning pedagogies in which teachers model the act of organic, authentic wondering, iterative engagement, and lifelong learning ([Harvey & Daniels 2015](#)).

### *PreWriting Tools*

Sometimes “getting started” is the most challenging part of writing. For students who feel insecure about their writing ability or their ideas, the challenge of beginning a new assignment can be even greater.

- *Lists*  
A great pre-writing strategy to keep returning to is bulleted lists. By removing the pressure of sentences and paragraphs and changing the form to a list, students can focus on the keywords of their ideas. They can circle or star the most important ideas to build their writing on, or number the ideas in the list to indicate the order in which they should be used in their writing. Lists are also a great jumping off point for writing poetry as well—every word counts in a poem, so beginning with a bare bones list of action verbs, brief descriptions, or concrete nouns helps to establish this idea from the beginning.
- *Charts*  
For students who need a more visual approach to getting started, we suggest reformatting any of the suggested writing activities into chart form. Sometimes having different tasks isolated in different boxes on a page makes an activity more approachable than a paragraph of instructions. [Here are a few sample charts.](#)
- *Conversation:*  
To help students generate ideas at the beginning of an activity, consider having a large group discussion in which students can brainstorm ideas, ask questions, and make suggestions to one another. Beginning with a conversation can be a low stakes way to further develop an idea before writing so that the writing will flow more easily when the students begin.

### *Sharing Student Writing*

In the Global Group on Write the World (click “Dashboard”), your students can share their writing with other young writers (ages 13-18) from around the world. Our platform keeps the focus on purposeful engagement: students publish their writing, read and comment on others’ pieces, and write and receive peer reviews.

Private groups, hosted by the classroom teacher, allow students to share their writing and write/receive peer reviews within their own classroom community. [Request a group](#) to begin your class’s writing space on Write the World.

Once your students have received comments and peer reviews on Write the World— and have had a chance to polish a piece of writing—we encourage you to find outlets beyond Write the World for sharing student work. For example, the resources for our Opinion Writing Competition share ideas on how to submit an opinion piece to a newspaper. Beyond this, there could be opportunities to publish in a school literary magazine or to perform a poem at a schoolwide event. Perhaps fiction writing or novel excerpts could be displayed in the school library along with books from similar genres. We’d love to hear how your class’s writing community shared their culture of writing with others in your school, town, or city—please [be in touch](#) to let us know! For published works, we ask that you or your young writers include a line noting that the piece was first published on <https://www.writetheworld.org>, the global online platform for teen writing.

### *Author Reflections*

Similar to an “artist’s statement” on display with an exhibit, an author reflection can provide some context for the work that helps both the writer (the author) and the reader (the teacher, classmates, or others) understand the writing process better.

Here are some questions to consider when writing an author reflection:

- What was your initial idea or inspiration for this piece?
- How did your ideas either change or further develop as you wrote? Did you have to make any modifications as your thinking progressed?
- What came easily to you in the process of writing? What aspects of this work were more challenging for you? Did anything surprise you along the way?
- If you were to revise this piece, what changes would you want to make or what would be your next steps in continuing to write?
- Before you write again, what would you want to learn more about, in terms of writing, grammar, idea development, evidence, or other relevant aspects of this type of work? (This is also a great opportunity to invite young writers to create KWL charts mapping what they Know, Want to Know, and Have Learned about a given topic, or the writing process itself, if KWLs are a formative assessment strategy that appeals to your instruction! [Here](#) is just one example of the practice).

A good place to look for inspiration or guidance on writing author reflections is our [Write the World blog](#). We interview each competition winner as well as the “best peer review” writer after each competition. These blog posts share a wealth of ideas on the writing process for these standout writers and reviewers and serve as a wonderful model for how to reflect upon one’s writing.

### *Responding to Student Writing*

One of the benefits of our platform is that it provides an authentic audience for young writers’ work. Whether your class is writing within a private group or in our global group, your students’ writing will be read by their peers—and will also be eligible for peer reviews and comments! The more readers a piece has, the more varied and meaningful the feedback will feel to the writer. And, with more eyes on the writing, there’s less pressure on you, as the teacher, to comment on every aspect of the work.

For an excellent summary of Nancy Sommer’s advice to writing instructors regarding responses to student writing, check out [this article](#) on the blog *Usable Knowledge* from Harvard’s Graduate School of Education. ([Nancy Sommers](#) is on Write the World’s Board of Directors and is an expert in the field of writing instruction!)

## **A Note on Standards**

At Write the World, we encourage our young writers to be creative, authentic, reflective, and empathetic as they engage in our writing community, working alongside and in collaboration with young people from around the world.

However, we know that sometimes there’s a need to identify more specific academic skills that are emerging throughout these thought-provoking and very personal processes of writing and revising one’s work. To that end, we’d like to share a few ideas on how Write the World’s platform—including our competitions, prompts, and peer review feature—aligns with a variety of academic standards.

### *Read Widely*

Monthly competitions, as well as the assortment of prompts we offer on the “Start Writing” page, expose students to many genres of writing. Reading previously published pieces in each genre—and also interviews with guest judges or winners from previous competitions—exposes students to exemplary writing. This reading practice can inspire a deeper understanding of the writing skills required in each genre and also spark new ideas about the subject matter presented in a piece. Reading widely—and learning to comment thoughtfully, peer review generously, and analyze closely—is a necessary and wonderful step in becoming a writer.

### *Engage an Authentic Audience*

Participating in a global community provides the unique opportunity to engage with an authentic audience in each genre of writing; to learn from others’ experiences, perspectives and cultures; and to add significance to the processes of reviewing and revising, since this writing matters deeply to the writer and to their participation in a monthly competition or the community in general. If you’re operating a private classroom group, your students are afforded the opportunity to get to know each other and reap the benefits of a close-knit writing community that cares about helping each other develop as readers and writers.

### *Take Ownership*

Finally, there’s a balance of structure and choice present in the competition schedule and the platform in general that benefits the students’ writing development. While a competition or prompt thoroughly explains the goals and related context for that genre of writing, the writers have immense freedom to make choices within that prompt or genre. The idea of choice is also present when students consider which pieces to read, review, comment on, or analyze. Teachers, too, have choices when it comes to using the competition resources in this packet or which prompts to use on our platform: we encourage you to consider what works best for your class or for individual students where necessary.

Below, please find a sampling of standards that address some of the skill areas and benefits of Write the World, as described above. These are only a few of the guidelines from the International Baccalaureate

curriculum, from the Common Core Standards and Next Generation Science Standards in the US (for teachers interested in promoting writing across the curriculum), and from the National Curriculum of England. We realize there are many more standards within each of these curricula and in other countries' guidelines as well—and we're confident Write the World has a place in every school!

If you're a teacher using Write the World in your classroom, we'd love to hear from you. How do you align with your national standards and/or curriculum using Write the World in your course? Please email [Lori@WritetheWorld.org](mailto:Lori@WritetheWorld.org) to share your ideas and help us better meet the needs of our educator community.

### [International Baccalaureate](#)

Approaches to teaching 1.4: Teachers encourage student choice in appropriate places in the curriculum. (0403-01-0400)

Approaches to teaching 1.5: Teachers facilitate student exploration of their personal interests and ideas. (0403-01-0500)

Approaches to teaching 3.1: Teachers ensure that there are clear examples of connections to local and global contexts in the curriculum. (0403-03-0100)

### [Common Core \(USA\)](#)

Range of Writing:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.8

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

### [Next Generation Science Standards \(USA\)](#)

[Engaging in Argument from Evidence](#) - chart shows “the progression of the Science and Engineering Practice of Engaging in Argument from Evidence, followed by Performance Expectations that make use of this Science and Engineering Practice.”

### [National Curriculum of England: English Programme of Study— Key stage 4](#)

Writing:

Write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information through:

- adapting their writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences: to describe, narrate, explain, instruct, give and respond to information, and argue
- selecting and organising ideas, facts and key points, and citing evidence, details and quotation effectively and pertinently for support and emphasis

SEPTEMBER

### Gender Equality Op-Ed Competition 2022

#### OPINION: What does gender equality mean to you?

Did you know that globally nearly 1 in 4 girls ages 15–19 are not in school? These numbers (reported by UNICEF) tell a story of inequality. While a quarter of teen girls are without economic, academic, and professional pathways, only one tenth of boys face the same barriers to opportunity. Gender-based disadvantage greatly impacts transgender and nonbinary young people around the globe as well—in some places, female, trans, and nonbinary youth are currently *losing* rights. But here’s the thing, dear writers: Gender equality is not just a feminist or LGBTQ+ issue. Gender equality lifts up *everyone*. Study after study [shows](#) that the most gender-equal societies have the best quality of life, and the happiest, healthiest populations, full stop. This month, in collaboration with [Malala Fund](#), and in recognition of the UN’s [Day of the Girl](#) on October 11th, we’re passing you the mic. What gender issue or injustice has impacted you, your family, your community, school, or country? In an opinion piece, tell us what change you’re advocating for in order to bring about gender equality in your part of the world. Change begins with the voices of many, dear writers. The world needs to hear yours.

*Writing Form: Opinion*

*Subject Areas: Civics, Economics, Journalism, Literature/English, Science, Social Studies*

*Length: 600-1000 words*

*Opens: Monday, September 5*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, September 12*

*Submissions Due: Tuesday, September 20*

TEACHING IDEAS and ACTIVITIES

#### Gathering Material

*Teacher’s Note: There are many ways to enter into a writing assignment—reading and reflecting are two of our favorites that you’ll see emphasized throughout these competition resources. In this first exercise, we begin with a picture book, as recommended by [Read Write Think](#) and [WeAreTeachers](#) for middle school and high school/secondary classes, respectively.*

The picture book *Dear Girl, a Celebration of Wonderful, Smart, Beautiful You!* by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Paris Rosenthal and illustrated by Holly Hatam provides advice and encouragement to girls on a variety of topics. Listen to a reading & view the book [here](#).

Using the chart below, we invite you to draw connections between the pages of *Dear Girl* and real-life situations, current events, or personal experiences. Add your own discussion questions for each topic that you add to the chart. We've completed the first example for you.

*Teacher's Note: This activity asks students to utilize their research skills. If there is a library and a teaching librarian available at your school, this might be an ideal time to schedule a class visit to learn more about using databases, reliable sources, and effective search techniques. (Alternatively, for younger students, you might find the outside sources and then ask the students to read and discuss the resources that you provide.)*

*Teacher's Note: To further differentiate this assignment, you might invite some students to read ["Girl"](#) by [Jamaica Kincaid](#) and use examples from Kincaid's essay in the chart below.*

Selected page in <i>Dear Girl</i> ...	Connection to a real-life situation, current event, or personal experience:	Discussion Questions
Page 1: "Dear Girl, keep that arm raised! You have smart things to say!"	<a href="#">A 2012 opinion piece</a> in the Harvard Crimson addressed the issue of women's participation and level of confidence in the classroom, as observed by the writer, a student at the time. A decade later, new research from <a href="#">Dartmouth</a> and <a href="#">Harvard</a> substantiates the anecdotal evidence of that opinion piece.	What factors might keep a student (any student!) from raising their hand in class? What can you, your classmates, and teachers do to mitigate this situation?  How does raising one's hand connect to other areas of life? Why does this issue matter?

### Choose your Topic & Find an Outside Source

*Step One:* When considering a topic for your opinion piece, review the [Competition Brief](#) for some guidance in brainstorming. Select one example of gender inequality as your focus (it may be on the chart above, but it doesn't have to be!) Choose an issue you are passionate about illuminating and investigating in your opinion piece.

*Step Two:* Locate an article, testimonial, or scientific study that further supports your ideas or illuminates more information on that topic. Evidence from an outside source further supports your observations and arguments in an opinion piece and makes your writing more impactful. Look for articles from reputable newspapers and media outlets. However, depending on your topic, you may also use material from other sources or social media creators. Always evaluate the trustworthiness of the source, either by verifying information through another source or by looking into the speaker’s credentials and reliability.

**Name the Emotion, State the Reason**

Your opinion piece will be most effective if the writing is clear, if the argument and supporting details are clearly stated, and if you’re able to convince readers to care about the topic. This final point means there needs to be compelling evidence, but also a compelling voice in your work. To begin to achieve these goals, use a basic chart to ensure your ideas—and emotions—are clearly organized from the beginning. This will create a balance of fact and feeling in your work. To explore a range of emotions we may not think about everyday, check out [The Feelings Wheel](#) for inspiration.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Emotion</b> <i>(Anger, confusion, hope, etc....)</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Reason</b> <i>(the fact or situation that makes you feel each emotion)</i></p>

**An Introduction to Opinion Writing**

An Opinion Editorial, or Op-Ed, is a piece of writing in which the author expresses their viewpoint, supported by evidence, on a topic that is of concern to them—and that they believe others should be concerned with as well! Now the terms “Opinion Writing,” or even “Perspective Writing,” are often used in place of “Op-ed,” but in some cases you’ll find that other forms of writing, such as letters or reviews are housed within the “Opinion Writing” category. For the purposes of this competition, we’re referring to opinion writing that is

most similar to an Op-ed: an essay that expresses and supports a particular viewpoint in the writer’s unique voice.

Recommended reading for familiarizing yourself with the genre:

Write the World blog posts provide...

- an [overview of the genre](#)
- [ideas from experts on how to write well within this genre](#) and [how to challenge readers](#)
- [suggestions for further reading.](#)

### [Assembly—a Malala Fund Publication](#)

Look to *Assembly* for insights into serious crises facing girls around the world—and to see how girls are responding with leadership, initiative, and determination to these situations.

### **Organizing Your Opinion Piece**

Here are a few suggestions for beginning to write your opinion piece:

1. Check out [Write the World’s Sample Op-ed Outline](#) to see how you might organize your opinion piece and to better understand each component.
2. Look over your responses to the first two activities and highlight or circle key ideas, phrases, or pieces of evidence that you included in those exercises. Begin to number these elements to determine the order in which you’d like to use them in your opinion piece.
3. If you have a lot to say and are eager to begin, then dive right in! Write out everything and anything you want to express, and then go back through and remove the nonessential or tangential parts. Carve out the crucial story, and you’ll make a strong impression on your readers.

### **Additional Resources**

#### [Guidelines for Submitting and Publishing your Op-ed beyond Write the World](#)

The resources for the Opinion Writing Competition in March include further resources for Opinion Writing that might be helpful if you’re looking for more details about this form of writing.

OCTOBER

#### **Climate Change Writing Competition 2022**

##### **PERSONAL NARRATIVE: How does the climate crisis impact you?**

This November, the world’s leaders will gather in Egypt to address the urgent threat of climate change. [COP27](#) is the 27th international summit intended to unite the world against the intensifying climate crisis—a crisis that, in the words of Egypt’s president, H.E. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, poses “an existential threat that we can only overcome through concerted action and effective implementation.” Yet COP conferences have been criticized for not doing enough. Greta Thunberg called last year’s COP26 “[A two week celebration of business as usual and blah blah blah.](#)” Indeed, it has been the world’s youth rather than its politicians that have sounded the alarm. As the [UN recognizes](#) in no uncertain terms, “Young people’s unprecedented mobilization around the world shows the massive power they possess to hold decision-makers accountable. Their message is clear: the older generation has failed, and it is the young who will pay in full — with their very futures.” This month, dear writers, ahead of COP27, help us raise the voices of young people in this urgent fight. In a piece of personal narrative, tell the world’s leaders gathering in Egypt how climate change impacts *you*. How has this crisis changed your environment, your community, your sense of the future? Storytelling, after all, plays a critical role in helping us grasp the emergency through which we are all living, igniting empathy in readers and listeners—itsself a precursor to action.

*Writing Form: Creative Nonfiction, Personal Narrative*

*Subject Areas: Creative Writing, Literature/English, Personal Development, Social Studies, Environmental Studies, Science*

*Length: 600-1000 words*

*Opens: Monday, October 3*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, October 10*

*Submissions Due: Tuesday, October 18*

## TEACHING IDEAS and ACTIVITIES

### **Write and Discuss / Writing Warm-Up**

*Teacher’s Note: Try beginning class with this writing warm-up question, and follow with a short discussion or opportunity to share written responses.*

Rasheena Fountain, an environmental activist, author, and guest judge of our Environmental Writing Competition in 2018, says, “I am from the belief that there is not one ‘nature...’”

What does this statement mean to you? What is *your story* of nature? Of climate change? Of the environment around you?

For further wisdom, writing advice, and resources, read our full interview with Rasheena Fountain [here](#).

### **Explore Climate/Environmental Issues**

[The Nature Conservancy](#) offers a wealth of information on climate/environmental concerns and conservation efforts by region of the world, and then by country within that region. Under the “About Us” tab, click “Where we work” and locate your country within the list of options. If your home area is not available, select another place that is important to you or of interest to you. The search feature looks like this:

## The Conservancy Near You

Find out what The Nature Conservancy is doing to care for the places where you live, work, and play—and get involved!

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After selecting a climate/environmental issue of concern within your region, write a reflection on how that climate/environmental issue impacts you—consider your relationship with the environment around you, available or threatened resources, and what the future may hold for you and the climate.

Within this reflection, begin to consider how you could tell the *story* of this issue/concern. How is your life and experience woven into this climate concern?

### **A Call to Reflection: Consider *Your Relationship* to Climate Change**

To begin to frame the personal narrative you want to share, write a reflection on (or discuss with a classmate) the following questions:

- How might you reexamine your personal choices or actions for the sake of the environment and climate change?
- In what ways is climate change a larger issue than your individual choices, and what emotions arise for you around that idea of magnitude?
- What personal observations of climate change are beginning to bubble to the surface for you—or have already impacted your community in major ways? What local environmental issue do you want to raise awareness about?
- What story can you tell? What information and emotional qualities in your writing will inspire others to care—and then to act?
- How does the topic of climate change—or the particular aspect of the climate that is of personal interest to you—affect you emotionally? How does it impact your thoughts about the future for yourself, younger generations, other species and/or the environment?

As an example of how environmentalists engage in their own reflective processes, consider the words of Taylor Freesolo Rees, an American filmmaker, photographer, and storyteller, in [this interview](#) (or see the Key Ideas listed below)

#### *Key Ideas:*

- Rees examines her personal choices in relation to their impact on the environment, saying, “Air travel for my work is by far the worst. These are opportunities for examination. Can I do something differently? Can I do what I need to with less travel?”

- She also considers the importance of connecting with *the people* who are part of a place, saying, “What we learned was a lot about the current situation that those villagers were, and still are, going through. We had no idea about any of that before the knowledge exchange evenings, sitting around a fire with a translator just openly asking each other questions and sharing. We learned that while yes, a lot of these village communities have over-harvested and over-hunted the wildlife of the jungle, the recent government’s ban on hunting was done in such a way that was without their inclusion and made it very difficult to adapt economically.”
- Finally, Rees discusses finding the larger story that a landscape tells, beyond individual pieces of scientific data, saying, “ Now that I’m a storyteller, I look at a landscape primarily for its story, for what it’s saying. And for its beauty. But I still seek out and notice the intricate connections that make up an ecological system. For me looking at the beauty of landscapes and seeing how life interacts within them is fundamentally the same for science as it is for storytelling.”

*Discuss:* Why might reflection be an important part of activism?

### **Understanding Personal Narrative as a Form**

While this competition focuses on personal narrative related to the environment—specifically, how climate change has affected *you*—reading and discussing personal narratives on any topic can bring you more familiarity with the form in general, preparing you to write. Here are a few sources to read and consider:

1. [“Picturing the Personal Essay: A Visual Guide”](#) by Tim Bascom in *Creative Nonfiction*, issue 49
2. [Winning entries](#) from our 2021 Creative Nonfiction Competition
3. [Creative Nonfiction](#) in *Write the World Review*, our online journal
4. [Writers on Earth: New Visions for Our Planet](#) — our collection of environmental writing from young writers at Write the World includes exemplar personal narratives (along with reflections, poems, illustrations, a reader’s guide, and a foreword by Elizabeth Kolbert, Pulitzer-Prize winning author of *The Sixth Extinction*.)

### **Write Strong Opening Lines**

One way to ground yourself, and your reader, in an essay is to give special attention to the opening lines. How will those opening lines invite a reader to go on this journey with you? How will they set the tone of the piece? Where (at which moment, with what detail) will the essay begin? We’ve gathered [some engaging opening lines](#) from one of our previous Creative Nonfiction Competitions to provide you with some examples. Once you know what your essay will be about, experiment with writing several versions of opening lines for your essay. If you have trouble deciding which beginning you like best, share your top two with a group of classmates and ask them to vote!

### **Draft Your Personal Narrative**

What are the best practices for telling a story about climate change? The same as telling the best fictional stories!

Essential storytelling techniques (point of view/perspective, dialogue, backstory, sequence of events, description, compelling characters, and more...) help writers delve into an environmental issue—and to convince readers to *care*. Begin to draft your own personal narrative, referring to the [Competition Brief](#) for guidance, and keep these storytelling techniques in mind as you craft your piece.

### **Edit Your Personal Narrative**

When asked if she has any tips for how writers should approach the editing process, WtW's resident Creative Nonfiction expert, [Melissa De Silva](#), had this to say:

"I keep editing my work until I can say what I need to say with the least amount of words. Also, I try to keep in mind what the reader knows, and doesn't know. Often I've found I might have something in my head, but it's not on the page—where it needs to be! And my third tip, also related to the reader, is to be as clear as possible. There's no point in writing the most beautiful sentences if the overall meaning of them is unclear to the reader. This is something I have to constantly work at in my own writing."

Your turn! Read through your essay looking for De Silva's three editing techniques, concise wording, important details, and clear writing, using the following exercises:

- **concise wording:** read your personal narrative aloud and see if hearing your own voice illuminates places that could be cut or condensed. As an additional editing exercise, try to rewrite a sentence or two in a few different ways. ([Here's an overview](#) of clauses and sentence structure for your reference!)
- **important details:** read through and highlight the details that you think are most important to the story. In a separate notebook or document, do some side writing on one or two of the important details. Do any additional ideas, descriptions, memories, or information come to mind as you write about these details? Should any of this new information be included in the personal narrative?
- **clear writing:** Ask a peer to read through your draft and highlight any places of confusion. Does the confusion seem to be arising from the wording of a sentence, from your use of punctuation (or lack of it), or around the events of the story itself? Consider how to address each of these areas of confusion and always feel free to check back in with that peer or another reader to see if your revisions added clarity!

Next, return to the beginning of your piece to see if you're still happy with the opening lines—and revise them if necessary. Sometimes the end of an essay can spur a new idea for the beginning. Alternatively, there might be a way to conclude the essay in a manner that touches back to the beginning—a technique known as "bookending." Can you, for example, return to an image, question, or scene from your opening paragraphs?

## NOVEMBER

### **Novel Writing Competition 2022**

#### **EXCERPT: Create a new world.**

Have you ever wanted to assume another identity? Live through a historical event? Traverse the Himalayas on foot? Novel writing is about personally inhabiting the world of your characters. And yet a novel also requires looking inward—reflecting on your own experience and interior life to develop authentic, three-dimensional characters. This November, join thousands of other writers in the honorable pursuit of novel writing (it’s National Novel Writing Month!) and then submit an excerpt to us.

*Writing Form: Fiction*

*Subject Areas: Creative Writing, Literature/English*

*Length: 600-1000 words*

*Opens: Monday, November 7*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, November 14*

*Submissions Due: Tuesday, November 22*

## TEACHING IDEAS and ACTIVITIES

### **Consider the Heart of the Story**

*Teacher’s Note: In this first activity, we’re suggesting an approach that asks your students to think about the story they want to tell... before they consider the characters, plot, or setting of that story. Our hope is to create a connection between them and their story that goes beyond moving characters around on a page, so to speak.*

“I knew that in memoir the writer was anchored in reality, but when I switched to fiction, I thought imagination would let me do anything. Now I saw that fiction had to conform to or mirror an inner rightness or structure that we carry within our psyches. One of the reasons we read a story is to bring forth from within ourselves that glow, that yes. The tale affirms something large within us.” —Natalie Goldberg, *Thunder and Lightning, Cracking Open the Writer’s Craft*

Step One: Consider the times that you have felt this “yes” moment while reading. Which stories, novels, characters, or situations generated that feeling of connection or wholeness within you? Can you identify what, exactly, in the story spoke to you?

Step Two: Consider a theme (something that gives you that “yes” feeling) you’d like to explore in your own novel. Begin to brainstorm where, when, and how that theme will play out on the page. For example, are your characters confronting changing friendships, an environmental emergency, a social or economic crisis, a

budding relationship, or a family drama? What kind of situation could convey the theme you want your novel to explore?

### Let Character Drive the Plot

After you've decided on a premise or theme for your novel, it can be helpful to get to know your main characters better through some side writing. (Side writing is any writing activity that helps *inform* what you're drafting, without being a part of the piece itself.) Try this! Brainstorm some interview questions, and then answer them for your main character. For example, questions such as the following might help you to sort out more of the plot line for your novel:

- What's something you wish for the other characters (family, friends, adversaries, etc.) to know about you? Why?
- What motivates you when you make decisions?
- What do you desire most and what are you willing to do to achieve that outcome?
- How would you describe your personality? How do others describe you?

After you've brainstormed a list of questions, it's time to step into your character's shoes! Let your mind inhabit their perspective, writing your answers as the character would respond.

Finally, when you return to writing your novel, consider how your character's answers might be reflected in the writing. Can you show what motivates them through their actions? Can you use their voice (dialogue or inner thoughts) to reveal what they are feeling? Overall, consider how your character's personality and personal motivations will influence how they act in the plot you're developing—this essential element will benefit your entire story.

Our [Character Study](#) worksheet, another good resource for side writing, provides a thorough list of questions and topics to help develop your main characters. Take a look!

### Learn from Professional Writers on the Write the World Blog

#### 1. Writing a Novel in Six Steps

In the post [“From My Desk to Yours with Michael Lydon: Writing a Novel”](#), Michael Lydon breaks down the steps to writing a novel to make the process more approachable. He suggests:

1. Begin with notes: quickly written ideas on the central character, their house, or their childhood.
2. Find the story arc or the framework of the novel.
3. Divide the arc into a beginning, middle, and an end.
4. Write your opening lines.
5. Develop the series of conflicts and supporting characters for the middle.
6. Say goodbye to the characters in the end: “Endings can be comic or sad, noisy or quiet, agitated or calm; what matters most is that the reader closes the book with a sense of satisfied finality.” — Michael Lydon

## 2. Writerly Questions

In the post [November Spotlight: Novel Times and Novel Minds](#), Lisa Hiton introduces readers to Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life*, explaining what it means to see writing as “a way of living” rather than a vocation. Then, Hiton presents a series of what she calls “writerly questions” for young writers to consider while reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, and *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erica L. Sanchez. These questions (or similar questions of your own choosing) can be applied to other novels as well. Lessons on the craft of writing, and techniques to replicate or reject, can be found in every novel.

## 3. Tips and Inspiration

Interviews with YA Authors [Fiona Wood](#), [Cath Crowley](#), and [Randa Abdel-Fattah](#), previous guest judges for novel writing competitions, provide further insight to the process of writing and editing a novel, how to draw inspiration from life and literature, and what appeals to them in novel competition entries.

### **Additional Resource:**

Novel writing competition winners from [2020](#) and from [2021](#)

## DECEMBER

### **Mini Competition: People's Choice**

Stay tuned! In the coming weeks, we'll gather input from our Young Writers about their hopes for this student-inspired competition. We're looking forward to seeing what our Young Writers propose!

*Opens: Monday, November 21*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, November 28*

*Submissions Due: Tuesday, December 6*

## JANUARY

### **Poetry Competition 2023**

#### **POEM: Your origins.**

*What remains of my childhood / are the fragmentary visions / of large patios / extending / like an oceanic green mist over the afternoon. (Oscar Gonzales)*

What are your origins, dear writers? From where does your family originate? How was your community derived? What has shaped your sense of place? Your sense of home? The language on your tongue? What connects you to the earliest days of your childhood? This month, dear writers,

write a poem about origins. From the country of your ancestors to the city where you were born to the place you first felt you could really be yourself, tell us, in poetry form, what “origins” mean to you.

*Writing Form: Poetry*

*Subject Areas: Creative Writing, Literature/English, Performing Arts, Social Studies*

*Length: 500-word maximum*

*Opens: Monday, January 2*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, January 9*

*Submissions Due: Tuesday, January 17*

## TEACHING IDEAS and ACTIVITIES

### Three Avenues for Brainstorming

*Teacher’s Note: The following three brainstorming exercises lend themselves to partner or small group discussions, or to written reflections or “free writes” completed in five-ten minutes. Alternatively, you could formalize one or more of these activities with your own writing rubric and an opportunity for students to share their final writing product with classmates.*

1. Artifacts, Photos, Facades and More...
  - a.) When considering your origins—and how you define what that term means to you—consider looking at physical items for inspiration. Can you, perhaps, sketch a landscape where you feel most at home? Do you have a sheet of music or a set of song lyrics that capture your identity? Is there a photo of an individual—a relative, teacher, neighbor, or celebrity—that holds significance for you? Is there a building, home, or school where the facade alone brings memories of days experienced there? How might you interpret or define the term “origins” in a creative way, rooted in the context in which you live, the communities from which you come, and these artifacts that represent so many aspects of your life?
  - b.) In his *New Yorker* article [“The Secret Art of the Family Photo,”](#) Michael Johnston suggests that sometimes the best “family” photos are those that you take with your chosen family. What does this sentiment mean to you and your origins? Johnston also writes, “I actually believe that the more that’s known about what a photograph shows, the more likely it is to survive. Don’t be shy about trying to record what you know about a picture, and about finding some way of keeping the picture together with its story.” Here is your opportunity to “record the story” of a photograph—what do you know about the situation, the setting, and the subjects of the photo that might not be immediately evident to others? What would you want your friends or future descendants to know about that photo? Write it down before the story—and all the nuanced details of that moment—are lost to time.
2. Object/Heirloom

Whether it's a cherished item fit for restoring at the [The Repair Shop](#), a vintage kitchen tool used in a particular family recipe, or a handwritten letter saved for years by a relative...there are all sorts of heirlooms—objects with their own stories and significance in our families—tucked away in our homes. Look around, ask a relative, or dust off an item you've always wondered about, and tell the story of this object or heirloom. In the process of writing, consider how this item connects you to others or even to other places that are part of your family's history.

### 3. Memories

Reflect on the following prompts to help define and describe the origins you'd like to share in your poem:

- Describe a place that is special to you or your family or friends. What do your family members or friends know about this place that might not be evident to others? What events, activities, people, or traditions make this place special to you?
- Describe a holiday or celebration that holds significance for you. What sensory details come to mind when you think of the various parts of this event—including the food, language, music, conversation, clothing, dance or games, speeches, setting, and so on...
- Describe a time when you felt truly yourself, or the best version of yourself. What factors contributed to the experience? How are these details part of your origins—where you come from and who you are today?

### Developing Your Ideas: A Two-Sided Chart

*Teacher's Note: Two-sided notes, taken from the idea of two-sided field notes in anthropological studies, is an easy and effective writing tool for further developing ideas. (It's also a great tool for making annotations and notes when reading literature!) For this activity, students will simply draw a line down the middle of a piece of paper (or create a two-column chart with 5-7 rows in Word or Google Drive or another program of your choice). The main topic becomes the title of the chart, and examples are placed in the left column. For each example, students should then write a short reflection in the right hand column.*

Sample chart::

1. *Topic:* What is Lost? What Endures?

Example	Reflection
Favorite song from 6th grade	<i>I've moved on to other types of music, but whenever I hear this song, I'm reminded of some of the experiences I had during 6th grade when I listened to this song on repeat. It's a reminder of who I was then—and how some of the experiences of that year led to my closest friendships today.</i>

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2. *Topic:* Values of My Favorite Community

Example	Reflection
<i>Adventurous</i>	<i>My friends and I enjoy hiking, kayaking, surfing, and rock climbing together. These shared experiences have brought us closer together. They've also shown me that we value the outdoors, which is not something everyone appreciates in the same way.</i>

**Transforming Your Ideas into Poetry:**

Amina Atiq, the guest judge for our 2022 Poetry and Spoken Word Competition, says, “You can teach anyone to write a poem, but to be a poet informs how you observe and reflect on the world around you.” How can the tools and techniques of poetry inform how you view your origins? Consider this line from the poem by Oscar Gonzales in the competition brief: *“when the wind pushed the smoke from the clay ovens...”* Gonzales creates a vivid picture of the scene in just a few, well-chosen words. Wind, smoke, clay ovens are keywords—all nouns in this case—that anchor us in that scene. The verb “pushed” creates movement: we can see, feel, and smell the smoke swirling around the scene.

Begin by listing the keywords of your ideas—the origins you want to explore and explain in your poem. Which words are nouns that anchor us in the scene? Where can a verb bring action in just the right moment? How might you expand and add similes or metaphors to illustrate an idea in a more concrete way?

For some context and background on poetry techniques, check out [WtW’s Glossary of Poetry Terms](#).

To read more of Amina Atiq’s advice for poets and to learn how her own origins influence her work as a poet and activist, check out our [Q&A with Amina Atiq](#) on the Write the World blog!

**Poetry as a Gift**

Although how you define yourself is deeply personal, the idea of origins also connects us to others. This poem could be a wonderful opportunity to give your words to someone who is part of your origin story or shares your origins. Consider the format: digital or paper, handwritten or typed, illustrated or with a family photo attached. However you choose to share your words, remember that what might seem like an ordinary writing assignment to you could be a priceless gift to a friend or relative.

## FEBRUARY

### **Song Writing Competition 2023**

#### **LYRICS: Our generation's rallying call.**

"A change is gonna come." [Sam Cooke sang](#) these words at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, putting to music a dream of millions, an anthem of change, a call to action. Music has always served as a catalyst for social change. Songs can tell stories, evoke emotion, even deliver lessons. And they can be shared widely, containing messages that, in the digital age, can be delivered with instant gratification while reverberating across generations. Dear writers, what issue is most pressing to your generation? In an original song, channel this urgency into music, to be sung and celebrated—a rallying call for listeners near and far. This month, write your own song of change, and record it if you'd like. We'll select a winner for best lyrics and best performance.

*Writing Form: Lyrics*

*Subject Areas: Literature/English, Performance arts, Music, Creative Writing*

*Length: 50-500 words*

*Opens: Monday, February 6*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, February 13*

*Submissions Due: Tuesday, February 21*

## TEACHING IDEAS and ACTIVITIES

### **Begin with Books**

*Teacher's Note: Picture books, with all their visual appeal and thoughtfully crafted writing, are a great way to introduce a topic of study in the secondary classroom—as recommended by [Read Write Think](#) and [WeAreTeachers](#). Consider using one of the following selections as a read-aloud in your class, and you may find that students respond positively to this entry point into writing. Sample discussion or reflection questions are listed below.*

1. [Change Sings, A Children's Anthem](#) by Amanda Gorman, with pictures by Loren Long.  
(Read-aloud video found [here](#))  
(Teacher's Guide with a dedicated page for middle/high school classrooms found [here](#))
2. [She Sang for India: How M.S. Subbulakshmi Used Her Voice for Change](#) by Suma Subramaniam, illustrated by Shreya Gupta

3. [Woodie Guthrie](#) by Bonnie Christensen  
(Read-aloud video found [here](#))

*Questions for Discussion or Reflection:*

- Why has song played an important role in protest movements? What sets it apart from other forms of artistic expression?
- How do each of these picture books model the objective of our competition?
- If there were a picture book to accompany your song, your “rallying cry for listeners near and far,” what images or important people would be featured in the book? How might these images and people make their way into your song lyrics?

**Listen and Respond**

*Teacher’s Note:* Begin by showing your class one of the performance videos listed with the [Winners, Finalists, and Highly Commended Entries of the 2022 Songwriting Competition](#) on our blog. Ask your students to read along with the written lyrics for each of the finalist’s entries as they listen to the performance. Then, as a group, discuss which parts of the song and which elements of the written lyrics are working well. Compile a list of tools and strategies (based on student observations and positive responses) that the class can refer back to for inspiration as they work on their own songs.

**Find a Way into Songwriting**

With so many songs already available in the world, it might seem daunting to create your own lyrics. But there’s always room for more music to be made, and always listeners waiting for the next hit! We have tips from experts to help you begin your songwriting process.

*Consider your audience*

On the Write the World blog, musicians [Paul Hankinson](#) and [Michael Lydon](#) each discuss the idea of writing songs for other people and the role of an audience in songwriting.

*Focus on a key idea*

[Paul Hankinson](#) believes that a simple idea is often the most impactful and memorable in a song.

*Gather your music role models*

Multi-instrumentalist and composer [Hankus Netsky](#) tells young writers to have “a repertoire of songs by songwriters they love and know those songs inside out.” He says these songwriters can “be all over the map stylistically” but that understanding what you love about these songs will help inform your own songwriting.

*Begin with the melody...or with the lyrics!*

Musician [Leo McFadden](#) explains how four chords accompany most pop songs; how you might begin with a melody or read your lyrics aloud until you can find a melody; and how one song can inspire another.

### **Understand the structure of a song**

Step One: Choose a song that you enjoy and identify [the parts of a song](#) that are present within it.

Step Two: Analyze how each part of the song contributes to its overall meaning or effect on the listener, and see if you can determine what you enjoy most about each part of the song.

Step Three: As you begin your own songwriting process, consider the role each of these parts will play in your song and jot down ideas you have for lyrics for each part.

### **Write Reflections and Peer Reviews**

Browse [songwriting entries from 2022](#) (our most popular competition ever!). Choose a song that captures your interest, and write a short reflection in response to these prompts:

- Where did the song capture your attention?
- How did it make you feel?
- In which section did you think the lyrics or pacing could have been improved in some way—why?

As you begin composing your song, consider these reactions! Reflecting on other writers' lyrics will help you stay in tune with what you're looking for—and what you would like to create—in your own original song.

As other young writers on Write the World begin to publish their 2023 songwriting entries, we encourage you to write a peer review, building upon your work in analyzing and reflecting upon others' lyrics. Remember to always share what's working in the song so the writer knows which lines are having a positive effect. By responding to the peer review questions and leaving annotated comments, you'll be providing feedback that the writer can incorporate into their next draft before final submissions are due.

Consider asking a classmate to complete a WtW peer review for you, too. Writers ask for feedback all the time, and knowing how others are hearing or interpreting your song draft can be really helpful to your writing process.

MARCH

### **Opinion Writing Competition 2023**

**OP-ED: Your turn.**

Do you ever feel like you have something to say, but nowhere to say it? A worthy opinion that needs to be shared? This month, Write the World is giving you the floor! What change would you like to see on a community, country, or global scale? From the unfair pressure on young people to lead the climate fight, to how a national law impacts teenagers, to a proposal for a new required course at your school—we want to hear your opinion about something that matters to you.

*Writing Form: Opinion*

*Subject Areas: Civics, Economics, Journalism, Literature/English, Science, Social Studies*

*Length: 600-1000 words*

*Opens: Monday, March 6*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, March 13*

*Submissions Due: Tuesday, March 21*

## TEACHING IDEAS and ACTIVITIES

### **An Introduction to Opinion Writing**

An Opinion Editorial, or Op-Ed, is a piece of writing in which the author expresses their viewpoint, supported by evidence, on a topic that is of concern to them—and that they believe others should be concerned with as well! Now the term “Opinion Writing” is often used in place of “Op-ed,” but in some cases you’ll find that other forms of writing, such as letters or reviews are housed within the “Opinion Writing” category. For the purposes of this competition, we’re referring to opinion writing that is most similar to an Op-ed: an essay that expresses and supports a particular viewpoint in the writer’s unique voice.

Write the World blog posts provide...

- an [overview of the genre](#)
- [ideas from experts on how to write well within this genre](#) and [how to challenge readers](#)
- [suggestions for further reading](#)

### **Opinion Writing Exemplars**

Begin by reading! Choose one of the [exemplars from the Write the World Archives](#), and read it several times as you answer these questions:

- How does the piece draw you in and hold your interest?
- What impression does it make on you? What about it do you think will stay with you in a week? A month? Longer?
- Is this a topic that already interested you or is this a new topic for you to think about? Regardless, how does the writer make you care about the issue? How does the writer persuade you that this topic matters?

### **Dig Deeper; Study the Structure**

Re-examine the piece of opinion writing you chose in the previous activity and consider the purpose of each paragraph in the essay. Annotate, take notes, or discuss with a partner which elements of opinion writing were most important for conveying the writer’s message. Identify any areas that you think could have been further developed to be more effective. This close reading and analysis will help inform the choices you make while writing your own opinion piece.

### **Gather and Organize your Ideas**

The [Journalism Education Association’s Guide to Writing Op-eds](#) is a good place to begin when deciding on your topic. Once you’ve read over and worked your way through some of the questions and suggestions that JEA offers, turn your attention to [Write the World’s Sample Op-ed Outline](#), which provides an organized look at each section of an Op-ed.

Begin to gather and structure your ideas on your selected topic using the Sample Outline for reference. While you need not follow it exactly, the outline can help ensure you include all the important elements.

When gathering evidence, remember to record your sources for each fact, statistic, or quotation that you plan to include in your op-ed. [Purdue Owl](#) has a useful resource on how to cite an article found online.

### **Draft and Revise**

As you draft and revise,, consider how varying your sentence structure—or purposefully choosing *when* to employ a certain sentence type—influences the effectiveness of your content and its impact on readers. For reference, read the opinion piece, [“The Short Sentence as Gospel Truth”](#) by Roy Peter Clark from the opinion pages of the *New York Times*. How does using short sentences (and paragraphs!) change the reading experience of your draft?

*Teacher’s Note: For further practice in analyzing and writing sentences, check out the fantastic examples in [Heinemann’s blog post](#) on the book *A Teacher’s Guide to Mentor Texts* by Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O’Dell.*

### **Additional Resources**

[Guidelines for Submitting and Publishing your Op-ed beyond Write the World](#)

APRIL

**Poetry & Spoken Word Competition 2023**

**POEM: Particles of life.**

*Poetry is eternal graffiti written in the heart of everyone.<sup>[i]</sup> Poetry is the journal of a sea animal living on land, wanting to fly in the air.<sup>[ii]</sup> Poetry is an act of peace.<sup>[iii]</sup> Poetry is its own prayer.<sup>[iv]</sup>*

“There is not a particle of life which does not bear poetry within it,” wrote Gustave Flaubert. Poetry is in the songs we sing, the trains we ride, the forests we wander. And, when we choose to look, we’ll find it residing within ourselves. “If we are looking for something which is new and something which is vital,” writes Audrey Lorde, “we must look first into the chaos within ourselves.” In this way, writing poetry requires a two-way magnifying glass. We must search inside ourselves in order to find a truth worthy of reflecting back to the world. This month, share with the world an original poem or piece of spoken word (poetry performed aloud). We’ll award two top prizes—one for a written poem, and one for a recorded performance.

<sup>[i]</sup> *Lawrence Ferlinghetti*; <sup>[ii]</sup> *Carl Sandburg*; <sup>[iii]</sup> *Pablo Neruda*; <sup>[iv]</sup> *Amanda Gorman*

*Writing Form: Poetry*

*Subject Areas: Creative Writing, Literature/English, Performing Arts, Social Studies*

*Length: 500-word maximum*

*Opens: Monday, April 3*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, April 10*

*Submissions Due: Tuesday, April 18*

## TEACHING IDEAS and ACTIVITIES

### Watch, Listen, and Read

Watch Norah Rami, WtW’s 2019 Poetry and Spoken Word performance winner, perform her poem, [“What Ancestry DNA Cannot Tell Me.”](#)

Norah makes performance poetry approachable for anyone looking for a creative outlet, or for those dealing with uncertainty about a performance. She says, “I feel that writing slam poetry is very similar to a conversation between you and your thoughts; it’s just what comes naturally. When I practice performing my poetry, if I can’t remember a word, I will replace it with another word that resonates with me.”

[Read our full interview with Norah](#) to learn more about how she became involved in poetry slams and how she feels about performing live or on screen.

### Analyze, Reflect, and Plan

Read and/or watch the winning and highly commended poems from our [2021](#) and [2022](#) Poetry & Spoken Word Competition.

After finding one poem that resonates with you, write a short reflection or list of notes on the aspects of the poem that impressed you. Identify which poetic devices (see [WtW's Glossary of Poetry Terms](#)), performance choices (tone, volume, pace, gestures), or overall message made an impact on you.

Following your reflection, consider these questions about your own poem:

- How can you use your observations (above) to inform your own writing?
- What do you hope to convey in your poem or performance?
- Which poetic devices will you use to draw in your reader or captivate your audience?

### Learn from the Experts

Guests Judges from previous Poetry & Spoken Word Competitions have a wealth of knowledge and good advice to share with young writers. [Jacob Sam-La Rose](#) explains how to organize your ideas and where he finds inspiration for writing. [Annie Te Whiu](#) speaks about the power of poetry and performance and how her various roles in the arts influence one another. [Amanda Gorman](#) shares how it's important to create a writing environment that suits you—and to write consistently, even if only for 15 minutes a day.

The award-winning poet [Phil Kaye](#) performed his poems and answered questions for an audience of WtW young writers and educators in April of 2021. Kaye's PBS feature, [available on the Poetry page of his site](#), includes a performance of "Surplus," a poem that honors his grandfather. Notice how Kaye uses repetition, cadence, and gestures to make his work come alive on screen.

### Additional Resources

Information about the organizations [Favorite Poem Project](#), [Louder Than a Bomb](#), and [Poetry Out Loud](#) are described in detail in the WtW blog entry [The Write Place: In the Telling](#) by Lisa Hiton. Each of these organizations have additional online resources available for your students' use as they write, revise, and (optionally) perform their poems this month.

Book Recommendation: [A Poet's Glossary](#) as described by Lisa Hiton on the Write the World blog.

MAY

### Food Writing Competition 2023

#### CREATIVE NONFICTION: Sources of sustenance.

Food—and the way we grow, source, prepare, eat, and write about it—links us to our families, our histories, our culture, our health, our environment, and our bodies. Food also plays a vital role in tradition, ritual, and celebration. "To write well is a public service, and a chance to influence millions," wrote the food blogger Lisa Gosselin. "To write well about food, is a chance to influence millions in their daily choices: we all eat!" Food writing can be an investigation, an exposé, an odyssey, a memoir. Perhaps you'll write about the pleasures of your grandmother's famous falafel or

the plight of the next-door dairy farm. And remember, as the journalist and cookbook author Ramin Ganeshram puts it, “it’s not really about the food.” We hungrily await your entry.

*Writing Form: Creative Nonfiction*

*Subject Areas: Geography, History, Journalism, Literature/English, Science, Social Studies*

*Length: 600-1000 words*

*Opens: Monday, May 1*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, May 8*

*Submissions Due: Tuesday, May 16*

## TEACHING IDEAS and ACTIVITIES

### Exploring Food, Memory, and Meaning

Food writing is about so much more than the food! This genre tells a story in which food plays a central role, but the themes and ideas conveyed are about much more than the food itself.

Begin by writing a list of foods that have a special place in your life. Below each food (or in notes branching out from that word), write several words to indicate the various descriptions, memories, associations, anecdotes, or deeper meanings that come to mind as you think of each item. Consider the roles of culture, family, friends, holidays, place/location, and anything else related to the food’s significance to you.

Look over your list and subsequent notes. Does one section speak to you more than others? Are there any connections between foods in which common themes become apparent? Is there a significant story or memory rising to the surface through a particular type of food? Reviewing your notes will help you identify the areas you’re most interested in addressing in your essay.

### Read and Discuss Food Writing

*Note to Teachers: Have your class discuss, or write responses to, the following questions based on their reading of one (or more) of the winning entries or honorable mentions for the [2020](#), [2021](#), and [2022](#) Food Writing Competitions.*

1. How does the writer engage you in the essay? For example, does the essay tell a story, build suspense, describe a scene in detail, or use humor to capture your attention?
2. What type of food does the essay tell you about? Aside from the food that’s addressed, what other themes and ideas does the essay cover?
3. How does the writer’s language, word choice, paragraph breaks, and sentence structure contribute to the essay? Why might this be important to keep in mind for your own writing?

### Writer Interviews

Sometimes there's more to the story than can be told in one essay. Writing responses to interview questions, or recording your answers digitally, is one way to share more details about your writing process and the ideas that inspired your essay.

Step One: Read our interviews regarding previous Food Writing Competitions with WtW young writers [Eloise Davis](#), [Audrey Wahking](#), and [J Leo Kuhtz](#) as examples of writer interviews.

Step Two: Write your own responses to the interview questions (or similar questions of your own design). If you're still in the process of drafting your essay, your interview answers might reveal some details that you'd actually like to include in the essay.

Step Three: Read your classmates' interviews, along with their essays, to learn more about their writing process and the role of a significant food in their lives.

### **Additional Resources**

Q&As with WtW's former guest judges [Limahl Asmall](#), [Andrea Nguyen](#), and [Sally Sampson](#) — for more inspiration and guidance in exploring the genre of Food Writing

JUNE

### **Letter Writing Competition 2023**

#### **CORRESPONDENCE — Words of thanks.**

Today, in the digital age we live in, a physical letter is imbued with significance: it tells the recipient that the contents are to be held onto and cherished. Some would even say that messages sent through the mail are still the sturdiest form of record-keeping, bearing witness to a time and place, and documenting our thoughts and feelings at the most significant junctures of life. This month, help us celebrate this age-old form by writing a letter of thanks. Expressing gratitude via the written word fosters connection, preserves a sentiment, and makes us aware of how much we have to be thankful for. And guess what? Writing thank you notes is also good for your brain. A [study](#) in 2016 showed that after writing about gratitude, our brains are wired—even months later—to feel extra thankful! Your letter need not be in relation to gifts, or even addressed to someone you know. Perhaps you'll write a thank you to someone you admire: a leader of the youth climate movement or the musician who inspired you to learn to play the guitar. Or perhaps the recipient is someone you know best: the dog who taught you about loyalty, a parent who taught you about courage, or a teacher who ignited your love for molecular biology.

*Writing Form: Creative Nonfiction, Personal Narrative*

*Subject Areas: Creative Writing, Literature/English, Personal Development*

*Length: 300-1000 words*

*Opens: Monday, June 5*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, June 12*  
*Submissions Due: Tuesday, June 20*

## TEACHING IDEAS and ACTIVITIES

### **Brainstorming Exercise: A Simple & Widespread Approach to Thank You Notes**

Write the World's Letter Writing Competition asks you to write a full letter thanking someone for something in your life, and not necessarily for a present. Another approach to thank you notes is explained in "[Perfect Thank You Notes: Heartfelt and Handwritten](#)," a 2010 story from NPR highlighting the book *365 Thank Yous, The Year a Simple Act of Daily Gratitude Changed My Life* by John Kralik. Here, Kralik suggests keeping thank you notes to just a few sentences on a simple notecard, and there's a special focus on writing thank you notes for gifts in particular.

Step one: Use Kralik's 365 day experience as a brainstorming exercise. Create a list of as many people as possible to thank for contributions to your life (from physical gifts to abstract concepts such as joy, friendship, or health).

Step two: Look over the list and choose three "thank yous" to explore further. Write a short reflection about each of these items/concepts/people, considering why you are grateful, to whom you'd like to direct your gratitude, and what this item/concept/person has meant to you.

Step three: Now select just one of those reflections—the one that you're most excited by or feel the most gratitude for—and there's your subject for your thank you letter for the Letter Writing Competition!

### **Learning the Letter Form**

For more exposure to letter writing and to be inspired by the subjects, styles, and voice of letters that other young writers have written, check out the following Write the World resources:

- [Our interview](#) with 2020 Letter Writing Competition Winner, Hannah Flores
- [Our interview](#) with "Best Peer Review" Winner from the 2020 Letter Writing Competition, Dearbhla McMenamin
- [All entries](#) for our 2020 Letter Writing Competition
- [Q&A](#) with 2020 Letter Writing Guest Judge Brother Richard Hendrick

### **Presenting Your Letter**

The article "[These Letters Written by Famous Artists Reveal the Lost Intimacy of Putting Pen to Paper](#)" from Smithsonian Magazine previews the letters from famous artists that are featured in a book called [Pen to Paper: Artists' Handwritten Letters](#) edited by Mary Savig.

After viewing the letters pictured in the article, consider the visual style a letter you write might portray. Your letter for the competition on Write the World will be typed, but you might also choose to write the letter by hand to deliver to someone else. Will you write in beautiful flowing cursive or in bold felt tip marker? Will you add doodles or sketches or stickers? How will your designs relate to the sentiments of the letter and to the person you're addressing?

JULY

### **Creative Nonfiction Competition 2023**

#### **PERSONAL NARRATIVE: Transitions.**

The teenage years are an in-between time, the stage linking our childhood to adulthood. It's a time of transition: starting at high school or university, gaining more freedom, finding a part-time job, taking on responsibility. Perhaps most importantly, it's a time of internal transitions, too, as we find out more about who we are and who we want to be in the world. It's no surprise, then, that so many of our favorite books capture this stage of life—with all its reflection and anticipation, journeys and crossroads, endings and beginnings. To name a few: *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah, *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, and *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan. This month, use the tools of creative nonfiction to write about your own experience of this passage into adulthood.

*Writing Form: Creative Nonfiction, Personal Narrative*

*Subject Areas: Creative Writing, Literature/English, Personal Development*

*Length: 600-1000 words*

*Opens: Monday, July 3*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, July 10*

*Submissions Due: Tuesday, July 18*

### TEACHING IDEAS and ACTIVITIES

#### **What is Creative Nonfiction?**

Learning more about a genre is always a good way to set out on a new writing endeavor. In the article, [“What is Creative Nonfiction,”](#) Lee Gutkind, the founder and editor of *Creative Nonfiction*, defines the genre and provides resources for further reading. Most notably, he's adamant about reminding writers that “creative” refers to the form and *does not* give the writer permission to make up something that didn't happen.

In our [Q&A with Rachel Friedman](#), guest judge for our 2020 Creative Nonfiction Competition, she explains the difference between a diary entry and an essay, and highlights how travel (and being present and curious in daily life) contributes to your writing.

After reading these articles, check out our interviews with [Koby Chen](#) and [Genevieve Smith](#), winners of the 2020 and 2021 Creative Nonfiction Competitions, respectively. Learning what inspired Koby and Genevieve,

and their writing goals for 2021 and 2022, might motivate your own work and goal-setting for the school year ahead!

### **Consider the idea of *Life Transitions***

To begin your essay, begin with transitions! Consider the types of transitions you've witnessed characters in memoirs, novels, and stories experience. What changes did they go through over the course of the narrative? How did they grow from the challenges they faced?

Now, turn the viewfinder on yourself. What are some transitions that *you've* experienced in your own life? Make a list! Items might include a newfound independence, a shift in perspective, and/or a first job or new responsibility? From this list, which experience piques your curiosity? Which do you want to write more about? Pick one topic and journal for several minutes on that topic, considering the significance of this experience, why it represented or set in motion an important transition for you, and what you learned from it. As you reflect, jot down any details that come to mind in the following areas:

- Emotions: What feelings were associated with this experience?
- Characters: Who else was present or played an important role?
- Setting: What sensory details were present at the time and have stuck with you as you reflect back on this moment or experience?
- Identity / sense of self: What changes marked this experience? Who were you—or *how* were you—before and after that transitional period in your life?

This journal writing will give you some kernels of truth, some details, and help you home in on the heart of your essay.

### **Write Strong Opening Lines**

One way to ground yourself, and your reader, in an essay is to give special attention to the opening lines. How will those opening lines invite a reader to go on this journey with you? How will they set the tone of the piece? Where (at which moment, with what detail) will the essay begin? We've gathered [some engaging opening lines](#) from one of our previous Creative Nonfiction Competitions to provide you with some examples. Once you know what your essay will be about, experiment with writing several versions of opening lines for your essay. If you have trouble deciding which beginning you like best, share your top two with a group of classmates and ask them to vote!

### **Editing Your Piece**

When editing your piece, we invite you to return to the advice from WtW's resident Creative Nonfiction expert, [Melissa De Silva](#):

"I keep editing my work until I can say what I need to say with the least amount of words. Also, I try to keep in mind what the reader knows, and doesn't know. Often I've found I might have something in my head, but it's not on the page—where it needs to be! And my third tip, also related to the reader, is to be as clear as

possible. There’s no point in writing the most beautiful sentences if the overall meaning of them is unclear to the reader. This is something I have to constantly work at in my own writing.”

Your turn! Read through your essay looking for De Silva’s three editing techniques, concise wording, important details, and clear writing, using the following exercises:

- **concise wording:** read your personal narrative aloud and see if hearing your own voice illuminates places that could be cut or condensed. As an additional editing exercise, try to rewrite a sentence or two in a few different ways. ([Here’s an overview](#) of clauses and sentence structure for your reference!)
- **important details:** read through and highlight the details that you think are most important to the story. In a separate notebook or document, do some side writing on one or two of the important details. Do any additional ideas, descriptions, memories, or information come to mind as you write about these details? Should any of this new information be included in the personal narrative?
- **clear writing:** Ask a peer to read through your draft and highlight any places of confusion. Does the confusion seem to be arising from the wording of a sentence, from your use of punctuation (or lack of it), or around the events of the story itself? Consider how to address each of these areas of confusion and always feel free to check back in with that peer or another reader to see if your revisions added clarity!

Next, return to the beginning of your piece to see if you’re still happy with the opening lines—and revise them if necessary. Sometimes the end of an essay can spur a new idea for the beginning. Alternatively, there might be a way to conclude the essay in a manner that reflects back on the beginning—a technique known as “bookending.” Can you, for example, highlight something that has changed, progressed, or been remembered by this point in the story?

## Additional Resources

[Creative Nonfiction](#) selections in [Write the World Review](#), our quarterly online journal

[Winners, finalists, and highly commended entries](#) from our 2022 Creative Nonfiction Competition

[Creative Nonfiction Exemplars](#) from the Write the World Archives

AUGUST

**Flash Fiction Competition 2023**  
**99 WORDS: A story in your pocket.**

“There was more room to think,” wrote novelist David Gaffney on becoming a flash fiction convert, “more space for the original idea to resonate, fewer unnecessary words to wade through.” Stories of the sudden/mini/micro variety pack the best parts of fiction into brimming, half-pint packages. Come celebrate the art of concision this month, dear writers, and write a story in 99 words or less.

*Writing Form: Fiction*

*Subject Areas: Creative Writing, Literature/English*

*Length: 99-word maximum*

*Opens: Monday, August 7*

*Drafts due for Expert Review: Monday, August 14*

*Submissions Due: Tuesday, August 22*

## **Introduction to Flash Fiction**

Begin by reading [our interview with former guest judge Janelle Milanés](#) who offers specific thoughts on writing flash fiction, as well as excellent writing advice for any genre. On the importance of capturing diverse experiences, Milanés says, “...my ethnicity is not at the forefront of my mind at all times. It happens to be a part of who I am, and in many ways I interact with that on a subconscious level. I want the same authenticity in my books for readers like me.”

**Brainstorming Exercise:** Jot down some ideas about your character and then, from there, build out some notes on what’s going to happen to that character in your story. Here are some questions on characters to help you get started:

- Which character or characters will be part of your 99-word story?
- Do the characters share some qualities with you personally, even if they live in a different time, place, or situation?
- How might you apply some elements of your own identity or lived experience to your characters, in order to make them feel authentic to the reader?

## **Consider What, Exactly, You Like in Stories**

Our blog posts on the winning entries from the [2019](#), [2020](#), and [2021](#) Flash Fiction Competitions reveal not only which pieces the guest judges selected as winners and for honorable mentions, but also what, exactly, they found engaging and well done about each piece. This type of analysis demonstrates the qualities that you might observe in other works of flash fiction that you read, or qualities you might study more closely as you craft your own flash fiction stories.

**Annotating Exercise:** Choose a shortlisted story from the [2020 Flash Fiction Competition](#) or the [2021 Flash Fiction Competition](#). Add comments (digitally or on paper) as you read the story. You can write reactions that span from simple symbols such as a heart for a moment that struck a chord in you or an exclamation point for something that surprised you, to more fully formed thoughts describing your questions, predictions, or

appreciations as you read. You might also try mapping out the movement of the story, considering these questions:

- What is the structure?
- How is the writer moving through time?
- When is the writer using scene vs. summary/exposition?
- How is the writer covering so much in so few words?!

## Write Your Story

Step One: Review your notes on the character(s) that will be in your story and reflect on the events, setting, point-of-view, and dialogue you might need to draw on to tell your story.

Step Two: Read these [top tips on writing flash fiction from David Gaffney in The Guardian](#) to become even more familiar with flash fiction.

Step Three: Don't limit yourself! As our former guest judge Tara Lynn Masih says, "Don't necessarily write with 99 words in mind...You can write longer, then edit it down." Masih also reminds writers to find joy in the process: "Have fun with the challenge of seeing what does not need to be there, what sentences or words can be cut. You'll be surprised at what you can let go! Have faith in your little story, that if it's done well, the reader can read between the lines." [Read our full interview with former guest judge Tara Lynn Masih](#) for more writing tips.

Step Four: Once you've written your story, exchange it with a peer and ask them to annotate it with their reactions. These annotations, completed in person or as a peer review on Write the World, can give you important feedback on the parts of your story that are working well—as well as the places that can be sharpened.

## Additional Resources

[From My Desk to Yours With Michael Lydon](#), and [this second post on stories](#)—thoughts from Michael Lydon over the years on what to consider when writing flash fiction

[Flash Fiction Exemplars](#) from Write the World

[Stories in Your Pocket: How to Write Flash Fiction by David Gaffney](#) from *The Guardian*

[FlashFictionOnline](#)—website and printed monthly journals