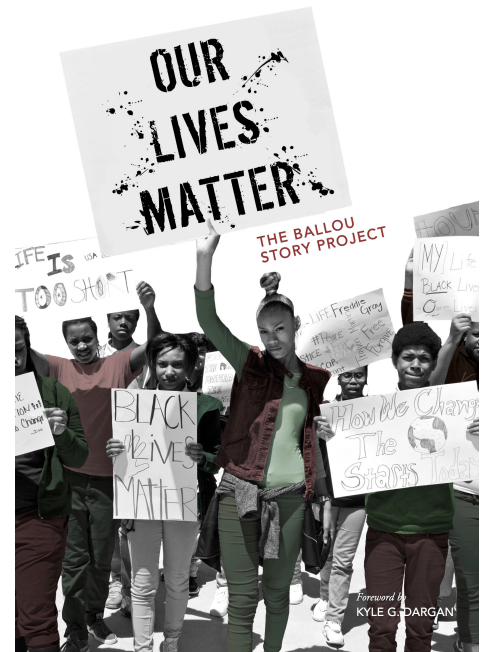


# *Our Lives Matter*

by the Ballou Story Project

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Through the course of a historic year of civil unrest and the emergence of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement, thirty teen writers from Frank W. Ballou High School in Washington, DC came together to take part in this national conversation about race, inequality, violence, and justice. Through their powerful, personal stories these writers intend to Change the Narrative about youth of color. We are not thugs, they say. We are not victims. We are big sisters and sports stars, academic strivers and everyday heroes. We speak out for justice. We dream big dreams. These writers want more for themselves, more for their community, more for their generation. And they are challenging their readers to listen, and to recognize in each story a common humanity worthy of dignity, support, and respect. This riot of voices must be heard.



## ***OUR LIVES MATTER* WRITING PROMPTS:**

- Write about a time when you made a difference in someone else's life.
- Write about a time you did something you never thought you could, and it changed you.
- Write a letter to someone in your life telling them why your life matters, and why theirs does, too.
- Write about why you dream big dreams for yourself.
- Choose a word people use about who you are that is powerful to you -- in good ways or in bad. Tell us why you feel strongly about that word. Tell us a story about when you heard it, when you used it, when you were called it.
- Write a piece called "The Things \_\_\_\_\_"
  - examples: The Things They Carried, The Things She Wanted, The Things I Believed
- Write a short fictional story of an act of violence in which another black youth is lost. But there's a twist: Write it **BACKWARDS**.

- Use repetition to start new lines or new sections. It gives you a framework. Examples:
  - People say “BlackLivesMatter” and I say ... People say “Don’t Shoot“ and I say ...
  - Imagine growing up where I did, along the Anacostia River in SE DC... Imagine ....
  - You should be proud of me because... You should want to get to know me because ...  
You should hear me out because ...
- If you’re not feeling the prompts re: prejudice or assumptions, don’t force it -- be honest. Start with a line like, “I’m tired of having to be a victim. Tired of thinking about challenges in my life or prejudices I face or .... I want to be \_\_\_\_\_”
- Write a short piece called “Ways to Lose Your Life in SE DC”. Make a list. For example:
  - Get in the way of an argument after a high school basketball game.
  - Decide you can do what your brother did and drop out of school.
  - Consider everything it can mean to “lose a life” -- getting into crime, or drugs, or depression... not just dying, right? How else can one’s life be lost?
- Flesh out a full creative profile of yourself that makes it clear why you are who you are and why you want what you want and why you do what you do. Example sentences:
  - I comb my hair like this because...
  - I wear my hoodie hood up because...
  - I smear orange lipstick on my lips because...
  - I put my head on my desk because...
  - I walk slow down the sidewalk because....
  - I go home and do my work because...
- Write down 5 emotions you have felt in relations to the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the violence that has prompted it. Then pick an emotion and write a letter to it.
  - Dear Angry, I am so tired of you. ...
  - Dear Sad, The last time I knew you was for that boy on the street, left there for hours after he took his last breath.



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