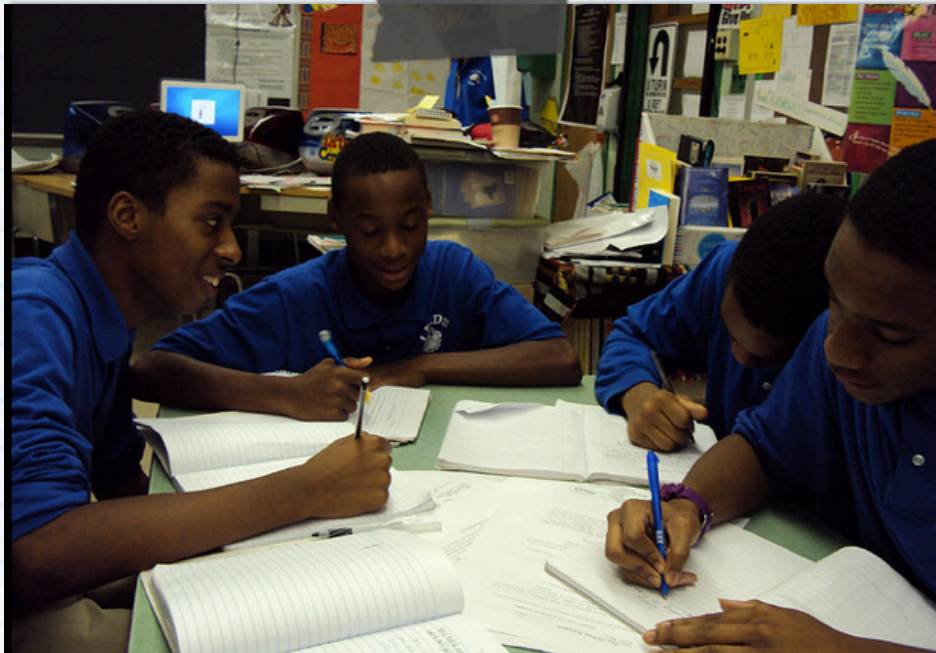


VOICES OF TEENS:

Writers Matter, Volume II



WRITERS MATTER AT LASALLE UNIVERSITY - DR. ROBERT VOGEL, FOUNDING DIRECTOR

Compiled, Edited with Written Updates by Erin Bloom

With Robert Vogel

The Writers Matter approach provides a unique and innovative opportunity for middle and lower high school students to learn critical writing skills through the use of journal writing. Through writing about their lives, the students find an effective emotional outlet at a time when personal expression and having their voices heard is so important. Writers Matter is a motivational strategy that encourages students to share personal stories with each other, listen to other voices, and develop effective personal relationships with peers. In doing so, the Writers Matter approach fosters within students a greater tolerance and appreciation of others, while also teaching critical writing skills.



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INTRODUCTION

What is Happening to Me?

by Beverly A. Buncher, Arlene Fishbein, and Robert Vogel

If you are reading this chapter, you are probably somewhere between the ages of 11 and 14. These growing years are the busiest times of life—for your body, your brain, and your emotions. How do you know for sure that you have personally crossed the bridge between being a child and being a teenager? After years of rather gradual change, some of you may now feel like this.

Imagine going to sleep one night and waking up the next morning in an alien world. You seemed to have traveled to a weird planet and are experiencing some very unusual things. Things look the same, yet everything has changed. Your whole body feels different. Your legs feel longer and a bit hairier. Your arms seem to have stretched, and even your hands do not look the same. Jumping up, you gaze at yourself in the mirror. Looking back is a face marked with zits and bumps. If you are a boy, “good morning” can sound like a cross between being deep in a cave and singing like a canary. That, my young friend, is your welcome to the new world of adolescence. A simple “It’s time to get up.” from your mother can throw shocks of despair through your veins. Doors slam, and your temper may flare enough to punch a wall. Seconds pass, and like a tidal wave, the anger floats away, leaving tears and sadness in its place.

Such situations are normal; they are just some of the expected craziness you will experience as you pass through puberty. Puberty happens anywhere from 11 to 18, but it usually occurs when you are in middle school, and so the term “middle” is very fitting. You really don’t know where you belong. Certainly you don’t want to spend your life on this alien planet; but the truth is, you have changed. In fact, some moms of young teens have been known to say, “Who are you? Who took away my kid?” And quite honestly, you may feel the same way about yourself. You are in a time of change, and while all change is difficult to handle, these changes are especially hard because they are happening in your body, your mind, and your emotions.

To find out which of the many changes of early adolescence has hit you so far, try taking this survey. Just place a check mark next to any questions you would answer with “yes” on the following pages.

Survey of Changes Young Adolescents Experience

In the area of **physical changes**, have you ever . . .

- Gone to sleep at one height and awakened the next day feeling somewhat taller?
- Been restless for no reason at all?
- Seen changes in your body that surprised or even upset you?
- Experienced tremendous hunger all of a sudden?
- Felt so much more mature than you did just a week or a month ago?

In the area of **intellectual changes** (this is how you think and feel), have you ever . . .

- Found yourself being extremely curious?
- Needed to be active most of the time, rather than just sitting in class?
- Taken an interest in other people's real-life problems and situations more than ever before?
- Had very strong feelings and opinions about what you see and feel, including the feeling that you are right and others just don't understand?
- Found yourself seeing the world from your own perspective a lot (this is called being egocentric)?
- Found yourself thinking about how you are thinking about things (technically known as metacognition)?

Now let's look at your **emotional and feeling changes** (psychological state). Have you ever found yourself . . .

- Very changeable in your behavior—one day you like one thing or person or want to do things one way and the next day you feel and act completely different?
- Extremely sensitive to criticism?
- Moody, restless, and self-conscious?
- Optimistic and hopeful?
- Searching for identity and acceptance from your friends?
- Wanting to make your own decisions, but at the same time, looking to others for help in the process?

Survey of Changes Young Adolescents Experience

And then there is your **social life**—your relationships with others who are important to you—it's changing too. Have you ever felt . . .

- Rebellious toward your parents, teachers, and other authority figures?
- Confused and frightened by new school or social settings?
- Fiercely loyal to the values your friends have?
- Aggressive and argumentative much of the time?
- The need to know that the adults in your life love you and care about you?

And finally, let's look at what is important to you as a **moral and ethical person**—that means how you judge right from wrong. Do you find yourself . . .

- Very idealistic?
- Having a strong sense of fairness?
- Reflective and introspective in thoughts and feelings—in other words, looking within a lot and thinking and feeling deeply about things you used to just accept at face value?
- Asking tough questions of yourself, your parents, your teachers, and your friends about what is right and wrong?
- Asking what we sometimes call the “mystery questions,” those huge, seemingly unanswerable questions about the meaning of life?

*Adapted from a list of characteristics of young adolescents found in *The Definitive Middle School Guide* by Imogene Forte and Sandra Schurr (1993).

You may have answered some of these questions with a resounding yes, while there are others you just can't relate to at all. Come back to this page in a few months or even a year and you may find more of them true for you. The fact is, you are in the middle of an avalanche of change, and so are your friends and classmates. This is not something to fear or dislike about yourself—it just is—kind of like the caterpillar-to-butterfly scenario, except that you don't go into a cocoon, unless you want to call your middle school years your cocoon. You came into middle school a child and you go out a full-fledged teenager. And while you are in the cocoon, you and all of your middle school friends are changing every day in ways you can see and other ways that are hidden. It's all very natural and very real. And since everybody is going through it, it is nothing you have to hide—It just is!

Listen to two comments made by middle school students, to hear what they are thinking:

By writing in my journal, it helped me learn to open up. I have matured and learned to take certain things more seriously. I am mature now and I'm able to face my challenges I'll have to face in life. It is good to get out your feeling by writing.

I'm beginning to realize other kids I know are going through the same things as me. They feel the same way I do and now I just feel like I have more people to talk to.

Now, let's get back to you. Have you noticed, for example, that you like to sleep more? The nap you fought against years ago may become part of your routine, or you may sleep in past noon on the weekends. Many teens do, and even if they don't, the people who study teenagers' sleep patterns say that with all of the changes you are going through, you need more sleep than ever before. Part of the reason sleep is so important during these years is that your hypothalamus, a gland that is found in everyone's brain, is busy working. It's producing GnRH, a special hormone that in turn sends a signal to your pituitary gland. Yes, your brain is also going through many changes as well.

This gland in turn produces a hormone that signals the production of estrogen and progesterone in the ovaries of girls and the production of testosterone in the testes in boys. It takes a while for the body to adapt to all of these hormones, so for a while you are on a roller coaster of emotions, while your body is going through its own development. Sexual changes and development occur with the growth of breasts in girls and testes in boys. During this time, there also may be an increase of two to four inches in height, and a weight gain of eight to ten pounds. Because bodies mature differently, changes occur at different ages and at different rates. Girls grow taller earlier than the guys—really awkward at those school dances. This can be a matter of great concern and may cause you and your friends to become very self-conscious as you see each other growing taller, boys' voices becoming deeper, and girls' bodies becoming curvier. You know what I mean. Oh, **it just is.**

This period can be misery on earth for some teenagers. Middle school in itself is a big step, signifying newfound freedom, new styles, and many unanswered questions. There is so much to deal with. Having a body that does its own thing without your permission may not seem fair to you and may make you feel a bit unsure of who you are.

The boy next to you in class or the girl on your bus does not look the same anymore. They seem to have grown up overnight and may look perfect, while you may feel like the ugly duckling. Meanwhile, they may see you as the swan and themselves as ugly—ever think of that? The comfortable friendships between boys and girls seem to change as well, and all of sudden you become aware of the “opposite sex.” There are new rules for this physical attraction, and you have to learn them quickly so you do not lose the game. The game is important, because it just is.

Often, it’s embarrassing talking to parents about these “growing up” issues, and they may feel a bit uncomfortable too. Yet it’s worth it to try to communicate with them as much as you can. They really care, and they do have your best interests at heart. While you want them to love you, you are moving in the direction of asking your friends or even an older sibling for advice. That works sometimes, but people your age and just a bit older may be going through some of the same confusion you are facing and won’t have the answers you are seeking.

You may really care that your friends accept everything about you and your social life is taking center stage. A lot of times this defines how you feel about your whole life. You may also find yourself going in and out of friendships as your tastes in friends change, and you develop different ideas of what is acceptable and what is not. As you form new alliances with different cliques, pressures may arise as your friends start exploring things that you are uncomfortable being a part of. It may seem as though the friends that you knew forever have morphed into creatures from outer space. Somehow you don’t understand where they are coming from, and you aren’t sure if you want to go where they’re going. For instance, you have just made some new friends who are really awesome. They like you, too, and so far you have really been enjoying hanging out together. Then one day it happens.

One of your friends is doing something you always promised yourself (and your parents) you would never do. It might be smoking a cigarette, trying marijuana, or drinking a beer. It might be at someone’s house or at a party. You are invited to participate. Your heart may start racing, or you may start sweating, or maybe you feel really good that you were invited to be a part of this group. Suddenly, you have a decision to make, and there is no adult around to help you make it.

Should you decide to go with your own conscience, or should you just go along? You may have another decision to make: what to do if you turn down the invitation and your friend's response is less than understanding. After all, if you say no, your friend may feel bad. They may feel you are judging them, and that may make them uncomfortable. So they may try to pressure you to join them, even to the extent of excluding you if you don't. At that point, you have reached a moment of truth. Peer pressure has arrived at your doorstep during a time in your life when friends may seem almost as important as the air you breathe. So, what are you going to do? Who are you going to turn to? How will you deal with this turning point? These are the kinds of questions you face at this time of life; how you answer them can have long-term consequences.

Decisions are difficult to make at any time. During the teen years there seem to be so many of them to make. At times it may seem like that alien from another planet is taking over your body and sending you all sorts of messages that are getting mixed up in outer space. This is because, in a way, your brain is being rewired, and not by an alien, but by your body. There is a part of your brain called the amygdala, which has controlled most of your reactions and actions up to this time. As you pass through this stage of puberty, your decision-making capability is moving into the front part of your brain, where the frontal cortex is located. Sometimes the messages may seem very mixed up. You may think about doing something that is wrong and know that you will get into trouble if you do it; yet there is this little something that pushes you to do it anyway.

A teen from a middle school in Philadelphia wrote about this kind of problem.

Have you ever turned your back and started walking away because of some foolishness? Well, I did. I didn't know what would be my answer or I didn't know what to do. "Should I or should I not?"

It was a Friday night and I was with one of my friends that I trusted so much. I thought she was a good friend. It was like 6:00 p.m. and we got to the store to buy a cheese steak because we were hungry. The next thing I know you see her buying two cigarettes. I'm looking at her like what is she doing? Then as we are walking she said, "Take it." "I'm like no! I don't smoke, what's your problem." Still as we kept on walking she kept begging me to smoke it. I said, "No, I don't smoke at all." She was getting so mad at me because I wouldn't do what she wanted me to do. I was so mad because I didn't know my friend smoked or was the type of person that would do that. Still minutes pass and she kept asking me. I said "No" really loud.

She said, “Jessica, you’re a chicken, loser, and dumb.” I know I knew better than to smoke or try something I didn’t want to do. Nobody was going to force me to so I turned my back and I walked away from some foolishness because it’s dumb to do something I didn’t want to do. I felt so sad and angry because I thought she was my friend that was good and that was always there for me. I guess she wasn’t. She was just a friend that would be a smoker and be there for fun. As I walked away I knew I made a good decision because I won’t smoke if I didn’t want to. I don’t need to do anything I don’t want to do. I now know she wasn’t a good friend after all. I thought she was a good friend to hang out with. That’s why I turned my back. Now it’s been a couple of years and she hasn’t even said a word to me but I know she wants to. I know what I did was a perfect decision.

Sometimes it is really hard to stick to the right decision. What feels right at one moment may feel wrong the next. It’s as if your thoughts and feelings are battling one another for attention. There are all sorts of strange, extraterrestrial forces invading your body. Your thoughts may get mixed up, and you may wonder who or what is taking over your thinking.

So, it’s not only your emotions and hormones that are confusing you, your brain is growing and changing in order to prepare you to make adult decisions. But it’s only beginning to do so, since the frontal cortex, the part of your brain that makes rational decisions and judgments, is not fully developed until you reach your 20s. What is happening is that your thinking is changing from concrete to abstract. That means you don’t have to rely on real objects when solving problems. Now you can think more abstractly, forming ideas and solving problems in your head. You are thinking more about the future and seeing more clearly about issues of right and wrong and are concerned with social issues and justice. Now, keep in mind, this doesn’t happen overnight; it happens in stages. And don’t be surprised if some of your peers think differently from you.

Let’s talk about the way your brain develops and how that relates to what you will decide when your friend asks you to try a drink or a smoke. You see, your brain is an incredible computer that is at a point right now of learning how to think for itself in deeper and deeper ways.

Each day that you live, your brain uses the foods you eat and the experiences you have to develop in ways that will help you think clearly, rationally, and successfully for the rest of your life. If you think about it, that's pretty amazing. You only have one brain, and it is yours for life. During your early adolescent years, this brain is developing at an amazing rate. But here is the challenge before you: You can have an influence on whether it keeps on developing and helping you become a successful human being or whether it stops at the teen level. This is a very big responsibility—are you up for the challenge?

Think back to your friend who was trying to tempt you, or to your own curiosity about trying a chemical in the form of alcohol or other drugs—and then think about this:

If you can keep your brain clean (free of chemicals) until the age of 21, your chances of ever having a drug or alcohol problem are extremely low, and your chances of reaching your goals and dreams are good. On the other hand, if you begin using drugs and alcohol now, during your brain-growing years, your brain and emotions basically get stuck at the age when you start using, and they stay there until you stop. That's why so many people who use drugs end up in jail. They've lost the ability to make the sound decisions that would lead to a positive lifestyle. They weren't born that way. It all started with a decision to try something that eventually took away their brain's capacity to choose. But it doesn't have to be that way for you—you have a choice.

I'm not saying it will be easy. It takes more than a Band-Aid or a kiss from mom to solve a teenager's problems. After all, today's world is marked with injustice, war, violence, and fear, and adults themselves often do not have the answers to the questions that are bugging you. In fact, adults are often so busy dealing with their own lives they often have little time for teens' questions. You may find yourself caught in between or confused, forced to deal with issues before you really feel ready. In today's changing society, one that's dominated by entertainment, videos, television, and computers, many teens feel they have no idea where to turn. So, if you sometimes feel unsure of your next move or who to talk to about what you are going through or even if anyone would care to know what is going on inside of you—you're not weird, you are normal—**It just is.**

Speaking of changes, have you been worried that others are looking at you and judging everything you do? They're not, but if you feel that way, you are not alone. Many young teens report being very self-conscious at this time in their lives. This includes being embarrassed at their parents' behavior, checking themselves in the mirror many times, and changing their clothes 40 times before leaving the house for a get-together with friends. All it takes is one glance or word from a friend, teacher, or parent to burst a young teen's bubble. Can you relate?

And then there are other challenges you may face. Some of these include being a latchkey kid, having addicted parents or siblings or a parent in jail, being exposed to abuse, growing up without a father, and dealing with stepfamilies. Facing bullies at school, dealing with violence on the street or on the news, or even moving to a new home or school can cause you to question your identity and your place in your family, your school, and the world. Any of these things can be very unsettling and send a teen into a tailspin.

Confusion and frustration are common emotions among young teens, so if you feel them, there is nothing wrong or weird about you. You're just at a stage in your life when you are trying so hard to find your independence that you will fight against authority or act like you think you know everything to feel more secure. Yet this just adds to the difficulties of this stage of life. It is now your turn to take a more active role in "What's Happening to Me."

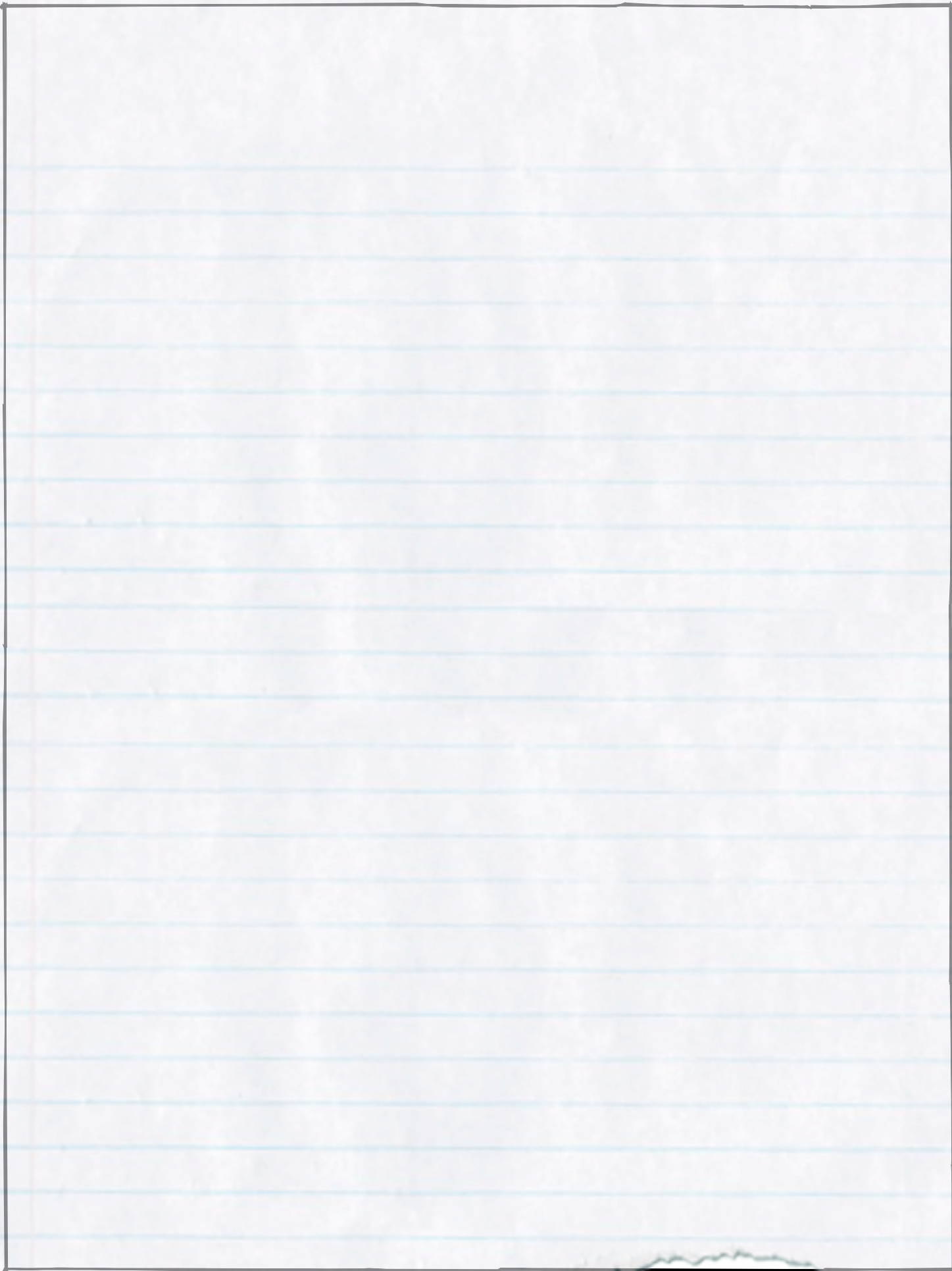
On the next page, draw a picture, write a poem, or just write what it is like to be you at your age. Try to capture your feelings and challenges, include objects that are important to you, maybe draw yourself in your favorite environment. Just put yourself in the picture any way you want.

One way to keep track of all that is happening to you is to find a "listening friend" who will always be there for you. Another way is to get in the habit of writing about what you are going through as it occurs, and that's what we will soon be doing.

Let's try an experiment. Take out a notebook or a piece of paper you will be able to find again later and just start writing about what you've read in this chapter so far. Are you going through any of these changes? Have you ever been confronted by peer pressure? What is your relationship with your parents like? Is it the same as always or has it changed?

Write as much as you want—or as little. If you want to, write about other things, such as: Who is your best friend? Who is your role model? What is your favorite subject? Who is your favorite teacher? Why? What do you want to be when you grow up? What is the most difficult issue facing you right now? Add anything else about yourself that you might want others to know—or that you want to remember about your life today.

Finally, if you feel like it, think about all of the things you are curious about and make a list of all of the questions you have about yourself, your world, and life itself. They could be as simple as whether or not you will have a boyfriend or girlfriend during the year, or as complex as if there will ever be peace in this world.



Some people call these the “mystery questions.” They are questions about things that bother you, maybe just for a moment, or maybe every day. You don’t need to have answers to them; just be aware of the fact that they are the mysteries that you face today. Some of the answers to them will become clearer as you grow, and some of the mysteries may stay with you forever. Either way, make note of them, keep track of them, and celebrate them; they are a sign that you are fully human, living in a world full of unknowns.

If possible, have a notebook just for this purpose; call it your journal or diary and write in it regularly. Writing in a journal is one of the best ways to find out the long-term answers to the questions of identity that face you, because the more you write about how you view yourself and your world, the better you will get to know yourself—it’s just that simple. And keeping a journal of your own over time will give you the ability to see the changes taking place in you as you grow. The notebook can be as simple as an 8½ x 11 spiral notebook from the neighborhood store or a bound blank book. It really doesn’t matter, as long as it’s yours and you use it just for writing about things that are important to you. You might even want to personalize the cover—even if you’re not a great artist.

Now, if you are satisfied with what you’ve written, just stop for a moment, take a deep breath, and go back and read what you’ve written, without judgment, just as an interested observer. And as you read what you’ve written, get to know the “you” who wrote all of that. Sit for a moment afterwards, and write some more. What you write at this point could be some answers to some of the questions you posed, more information you forgot to put in, or just some insight you gained from reading about yourself. Then close the journal and come back to this chapter and let’s talk about you and who you are.

Kevin, a seventh grader, wrote:

It has helped me understand that my feelings are important. Writing my feelings down will let other people know you are going through the same things that they are and that you are not alone. It also helped me understand that writing is something that I now, even more than before, love to do. That is how writing has helped me. It has taught me that when I get discouraged or I need to let something out, I can now just write it down on paper. It has made me stronger.

Soon, the alien planet will not look and feel so strange and will be more like home because **it just is.**

Two talented middle school educators co-wrote this chapter with Robert Vogel for the first edition of Voices of Teens: Writers Matter. Their understanding of the middle school child paved the way for the rest of the chapters in the book. Many thanks to Beverly Buncher and Arlene Fishbein for their contributions.

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CHAPTER ONE

Allow Me to Introduce Myself...

Now that you have an idea of what Voices of Teens: Writers Matter is all about, you are ready to take on the “I Am From” and “The Skin I’m In” writings, the first personal writing experiences of the year. The first piece, “I Am From,” gives you the opportunity to explore the things that matter the most to you and the people, places and events that make you unique. When you write your “I Am From” piece, you will be given the opportunity to show others where you come from and what your life is like. As you know, we are all individuals who are shaped by the unique experiences that we encounter throughout our lives. In spite of our differences, we all also share a common bond that will be revealed through our writing. To begin your writing, use the brainstorming guide below. Sketches and other illustrations are also helpful and reveal a lot about you, so feel free to illustrate any part of your writing.

In the boxes below, write details that fit into each category. Remember to write down your thoughts as they come to you-- you will be given a chance to organize them later on in the writing process.

My Family

My Friends

Foods I Like or Have A Lot at Home

My Culture/Religion

My Hobbies/After School Activities

My Favorite Line from My Favorite Song:

“I Am From” Brainstorming (continued)

My Nicknames or the Meaning of My Name

My Neighborhood

Things I Wonder About or Question

My Fears:

My Dreams for the Future:

Things I Hear When I'm On My Block:

My Most Prized Possession:

My Values/Morals/Beliefs:

Family Sayings/Other Languages Spoken:

Any Other Important Details About You:

“I Am From” Student Writing

Now that you have completed your brainstorming and have identified many of the items that make you unique, you are ready expand on your ideas. As you read examples of the “I Am From” poems from other students in the pages that follow, you will notice that they are very descriptive. In other words, rather than just telling you about their lives, they show you in the way that they use their words. For example, in Journal #2, the student wrote:

“I am from a place where people stand at the front of the store scratching lottery tickets.”

Rather than simply telling us that she lives on block with a corner store, the student helps us to visualize her neighborhood by telling us that people stand in front of the store “scratching lottery tickets.” Now it is your turn to do the same. Use a few of your ideas from the Brainstorming Guide and use vivid description to help us “see” where you are from. Use the example to help you if needed.

My Idea: *I am from playing basketball.*

My Revised Line with Description: *I am from loud whistles and even louder cheers, from broken bleachers and three-point swooshes through the rim.*

My Idea: _____

My Revised Line with Description: _____

My Idea: _____

My Revised Line with Description: _____

My Idea: _____

My Revised Line with Description: _____

Now it is time to really “dig in” and read some examples of real student “I Am From” pieces. Just like you, these students brainstormed a list of items to include in their poems, added details to each of these items to create vivid descriptions and organized their thoughts to create a complete “I Am From” piece. As you read or listen to each of the journal entries, feel free to write notes in the margins. (This book is yours!) Then, answer the questions that follow the piece. These questions will also help you in writing your own “I Am From.”

Journal #1

Where I Am From (6th Grade)

I am from "yes" to "no," from "hi" to "goodbye"
I am from a hateful whisper to a muffled cry
From a girl's shallow eyes cutting into my pride
I am from words like "ugly," "black" and "fat"
From struggling not to believe them, I try
I am from gun shots and mug shots
From where respect is a photo with a shirt off and a middle finger up
I am from a place where if you join in, maybe you won't be gone
From trying to blend in, never to stand out
I am from a fake smile that I show to the world
From where if you don't like me, I'll change
I am from wrath, hatred and pain
From still trying to feel better about myself
I am from looks and stares after I get my hair done
From dark skinned girls wishing they were light skinned
I am from people looking at me like I play the victim role
From trying to show them it's not just a part I'm playing
I am from a place where my father left
From where people sing "miss me a little when I'm gone"
I am from where every argument starts with, "Your father..."
From knowing he's not even around to take the blame
I am from my mom's words, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired"
From taking care of her when she is sick and tired
I am from gospel music playing during the day to rap music at night
From church on Sundays and jail visits on Mondays
I am from being told to stay on my block
And from wanting nothing more than to leave for good
I am from wanting to be from another "I Am From."

1) How is this writer's life similar to yours?

2) How is it different?

Curriculum Connection:

3) Which type of figurative language does the author use in line 3: "From a girl's shallow eyes cutting into my pride?"

Journal #2

I Am From (6th Grade)

I am from Germantown with its corner stores and corner men hustling drugs
From empty cabinets to spending 25 cents I found on the sidewalk for a bag of chips
I am from a home where your neighbors are all in your hair trying to make some change
From having brothers and sisters who don't even know me
I am from a home with a bunk bed and more than two people to sleep in it
From the gospel channel always being on because it is the only one that works without cable
I am from a home with so many people but where you still feel lonely
From a home without a dad and a brother who comes in every once in awhile
I am from where you take a lot of vitamins because there isn't any money to take care of you
if you are sick
From where you go to street sales to buy other's used things and come home feeling
happy
I am from a place where people stand at the front of the store scratching lottery tickets
From where my school is only a few blocks away
I am from where the kids walk past and laugh
From a home where I am praying for a better life.

Journal #3

I Am From (6th Grade)

I am from a family of many
From a family that has raised me
Not one, but two, that I love daily
I am from a mother and a father
That have encouraged me to be the girl that I am now
I am from hardworking people
And three loving pets
I am from God and am truly grateful
I am from praying each night for success
From knowing that I am blessed
I am from the past, present and a bright future
I am from life right at my fingertips
From Facebook, YouTube and Instagram
From the social connections of friends
I am from just being me
From living life the way that I see
I am from a world filled with hope
From trying to right others bad decisions
I am from Philadelphia
From returning to Brotherly Love
And leaving behind the hate.

1) How are the lives of these poets similar? How are they different?

Curriculum Connection:

2) Write one example of alliteration from either of the poems here:

Journal #4

I Am From (6th Grade)

I am from my mother's love and my father's aggression
From one parent who is with me no matter what
From another who abandoned me when I was six
I am from home to home
From two different worlds
But still much of the same
From places where there is as much death as in war
I am from violent streets and graffitied walls
From broken promises and a broken home
From more bad memories than good
From having to be tough and get over it
From a place where I'm told boys don't cry
From hiding my teardrops on my pillow at night
I am from cleaning up some grown man's mess
From protecting my brother like a bulletproof vest
I am from people who just don't understand
From having anger issues because of the words that are stuck in my head
I am from a life full of hardships and trials
I am from living life while it lasts.

Journal #5

I Am From (6th Grade)

This is the story of my life

This is who I am

This is how it all began...

I am from North Philly
From where you go when you have nobody to turn to
Where times are hard, times are tough
From where violence and crime is bad enough
I am from a place where no one vacations
From where you wouldn't even risk waiting at the bus station
I am where more people seem to hate me than love me
From making sure I ignore the haters and just stay me
From remembering the good times me and my family had
From knowing that God is still holding onto us and I'm glad
From being out there in a dangerous hood
And sitting back in school, trying to be good
From making the grades and staying smart
I am from being the one who has heart
I am from where you learn times get rough when you're not trying
From where you need to face your fears and stop hiding.

1) Which poem do you relate more to and why?

Curriculum Connection:

2) What is the effect of the use of rhyme in Journal #5?

Journal #6

I Am From (7th grade)

I am from my life being like a tornado.

I am from smiles and hugs and feeling like everyone loves me.

I am from a place close to my heart and that always will be.

I am from going outside with all my friends,

From laughing and talking until the day comes to an end.

I am from hearing the sound of basketballs being dribbled as soon as I step outside,

The arguing of the players and those on the sidelines.

I am from the smells of people's dinner being blended with the fresh air.

I am from a world full of twists and turns; millions of lessons I've already learned.

I am from true friends who always have my back,

From being able to talk to them when I feel everything just came under attack.

I am from being like a princess, as pretty and lucky as can be,

From being surrounded by a family who loves and supports me.

I am from beauty and brains, the one God chose,

From heaven, an angel sent from above.

I am from a life that can be crazy sometimes,

But I am perfectly fine because that crazy life is the one I can call mine.

Journal #7

I Am From (7th grade)

I am from a place where babies run around with no shirt or pants

From dirty faces and dirtier places

I am from kids running and playing with poles and sticks

From a place where helicopters above twist the wind like a tornado

I am from a place where police sirens are our music.

From a place where you can taste the polluted air.

I am from a place where you can see the evil in people's faces.

From where kids younger than ten are on the corner

Gambling their lives away like they're at an Atlantic City casino.

I am from a place where people go to school for profanity.

A place where people act like ruthless pirates stealing people's possessions.

I am from West Philly:

A place where people don't know right from wrong.

1) How are the lives of these two writers the same? How are they different?

2) What do you wish you could say to the writer of Journal #7?

Curriculum Connection:

2) There are several examples of simile in these two poems. Choose one, write it here and explain its meaning.

Journal #8

i Am From (8th grade)

I am from.... I don't know where I am from.

I am from dumbfounded, blank faces and whiteout friends.

I am from, where the word "FAITH" is replaced with hate

Where the loving houses are only burned down crisis.

I am from where the light of day is only a dream because the light is afraid of the days that belong to dark.

I am from "LOVE"....wait, hold up: Love is only in a fantasy

I am from way under, below the low grounds of Christianity.

I am from where a walk to the store is only a walk to hell, they have open doors.

I am from Logan, the valley, way past reality

Where the word LIFE will have you shaking; I can tell your body is quaking

I am from black, far away from whack

I am from where "dress down" will have you shot to the ground.

I am from where virginity is only in the past, because once you have laid too fast, you can't turn around and walk back!

I am from, a sister that tries and a brother that would rather hide,

I am from a dad that drinks, when he should be paying for his daughter to think.

I am from an upside-down smile, a backward crowd

I am from low lives and bye-byes, broke up fears and unwanted tears

I am from where school is a place that you don't want to face

I am from where hearts are broken

I am from where jumps are punks and punks are always flunks

I am from where mace will always meet your face

From when you turn around to a fight that might be your last night

I am from when the boys come everybody grabs their gun and runs

I am from a place that you shall never come

I am from unwanted faces

From words that hurt and hurting from words

I am from hand-me-down's, sometimes that can't be hand-me no more

I am from where you hustle and bustle and will always make the flow

I am from the only education you will get is from the uneducated

I am loyal only to the foil of my own bones

I pray only to the voice above, but I'll lay for the voice of a scrambling love

I am from hope, but the more I spoke of this hope the more hope will not be spoken.

I am from tricks that lead to lies and lies that lead to crimes

From Crimes that lead to your hands grinding behind the cold metal bars of a jail cell.

I am from a place called Hell.

1) What makes this writing powerful or meaningful?

Curriculum Connection:

2) Is the overall tone of this poem positive or negative? Write one example from the poem to support your choice.



Journal #9

I Am From (8th grade)

Born and raised here, a plant never up rooted from its soil.

I am from a city: a big city yet a humble city.

From Philadelphia: a city of diversity.

A city where everyone is family, even the worst of enemies.

The city of Brotherly Love.

A city that people might not like but can't hate.

A place where everyone has a face, has something to say, and nobody is the same.

Not the best city but defiantly not the worst, the city has its perks.

New York's the big city, and D.C's the capital city, but Philadelphia is the birth city.

Rich with history, this city never lost its roots.

As if the past were still alive, America's roots trace all the way back here.

Birth place of America, where the Declaration was signed.

A city of beauty that never gets old, neither does its citizens.

A sky line seen the world over, its impossible to forget the view.

A city 2 million strong ready to stand for where we belong.

Tourists come and go, never to return again,

but when you're born in Philly you always come back home in the end.

An unforgettable city.

Once you've been there you always remember how to get there .

From City Hall and all its power to the Library and its knowledge,

From the Art Museum and all its culture to Fairmount Park and all its beauty.

Just another city through average eyes,

A gem through the people of Philly's eyes.

1) This poem focuses on a single aspect of the writer's life. What is the focus of this poem?

2) Would you describe our city in the same way that the writer does?

Curriculum Connection:

3) What metaphor does the author use in this poem? What does it mean?

Journal #10

I Am From (8th grade)

I am from that little girl with the golden smile, forbidden from the outside, who escaped for a while.

I am from a mom you don't know because looks don't show what goes on behind closed doors. I'm from being called out by my name, from being afraid of myself.

I am from a smile that will never show the pain overlooked by the ones that watched me grow. So when I cry, I must lie: I bumped my head, I cracked my toe.

I am from holding back my secrets from my past, heated from the words thrown at me
From crying because my family is leaving me, because I don't live up to the expectations they set for me.

From feeling like what if I don't complete the task set before me?

More trouble poured on me?

Another chapter of my life. Something else to yell about.

I'm from boys wanting nothing more but to freak me, never keep me, and pass me on.

I'm from thinking so much I get a brainstorm.

I'm from that blue room with two windows,

From watching my skin glow from the sun

From barely peeking through my covers, absorbing my tears,

From watching the days pass hiding my fears.

I'm from very ballistic words, being confronted with absurd looks and voices saying, "Dumb it down!"

I'm from that million-dollar plan,

From trying to find a residence to house these thoughts of mine.

I'm from people that don't listen to me because I present myself too innocently.

I'm from reproduction and Death Row.

From being struck because I question God.

Where was he when I needed him most?

I would pray and no Savior would come.

I'm from being abused, kicked out, and almost killed by my mother.

From being scared for my brother.

I am from being a little girl with the vast eyes, from accepting life and all its surprises.

I'm from going to sleep envisioning my dreams.

I'm from saying, "Be with me? Forever? No matter the weather?"

From believing if you need a friend, I'll be there indeed.

I'm from just trying to be unforgettable for the right reason.

I am from wanting people to remember me!

1) What would you like to say to the writer of this poem?

Curriculum Connection:

2) What type of figurative language is used in the line: "From trying to find a residence to house these thoughts of mine?"

Journal #11

I Am From (6th grade)

I am from romance, from happiness and sunshine.
Where love is expected and when you're there your accepted.
I am from sounds.
From music. From R&B, Jazz and hip-hop.
From streets to houses.
I am a melody.
I am from the past.
From the heart that never cracks.
Glass that doesn't shatter.
From Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love.
From the streets of littering, the house of siblings.
I am from life.
From where you take one breath at a time.
I am from the concrete stained from dead people.
From ability and non-ability.
I am from passion, from experiences.
From the love and betrayal of others.
I am from California earthquakes and tears, from moons and sun.
I am from winter, summer, fall, spring.
I am from love gifts.
I am from hope from chances.
Where life is a question these days.
I am from where hearts barely pump.
From where lives are wasted.
From equality.
From where we matter.
I am from where your house is not always the safest place.
I am from escaping.
From childish games.
I am from where if you are nice you're also six feet in the ground.
I am from complications.
From when these days just talking to others is no sensation.
From keeping secrets and having yours read out loud.

1) What is the surprising twist at the end of this poem?

Curriculum Connection:

2) What is one example of hyperbole from the poem?

Journal #12

I Am From - A Free Verse Poem (8th grade)

As I walk along
the filthy streets
watching the reflections of skyscrapers
while the exhaust fumes and smoke mix
As I hear
The mad babbling and screaming of those distant from sanity
As I walk home
I see the left behind and lost things,
the possessions of the homeless
When I feel the crisp air
know it's filled with sorrows and it is grim
The streets once filled with lavish plants now hold metal and concrete
I then turn on my street
And from my mind is erased all those things
And my mind is cleared by pure air It ruins the bitterness of the left
Behind in the city
As the bland day ends comfort stays like the stars in the night sky
And the night will go with that one cricket chirping
That's where I'm from.

1) Which "I Am From" poem is your favorite poem? Why is this your favorite?

2) What is one line from any of the poems that you will use to inspire a line of your own poem? How will you change this line to use it in your writing?

Curriculum Connection:

3) All of the writers included examples of figurative language in their poems. Why is it important to use figurative language in your writing?

After all of that preliminary work, now you are ready to write your own draft of an "I Am From." Like the writers that came before you, don't be afraid to really show your soul in your writing. You may discover that your "I Am From" draft is really never finished. Like you, it is a work in progress. So don't feel like you need to include every detail right now--you may continue to add lines and "grow" your poem as you grow throughout the year.

The Skin I'm In

Now that you have really explored your life and background in your "I Am From" poem, it is time to really dig deep and look into yourself. What do you see when you look at yourself? Do you think that others see the same person? As you read in the introduction to this book, you are going through a period in your life where your identity is constantly evolving. Take this time to discover who you really are and who you want to be. The perfect next step in your journey is to write a piece called "The Skin I'm In."

Using the template below and on the following page, fill-in each blank to write the rough draft of your "The Skin I'm In" piece. Be sure to be detailed and write whole, descriptive phrases, not just one word responses for each line. After you complete your rough draft, you will transfer it to your journal where you will be able to make edits and additions to your poem before creating your final draft.

Line 1: I am _____ . (Your name or nickname)

Line 2: _____ , _____ ,

_____ , _____

4 adjectives (character traits, etc.) to describe you

Line 3: The skin I'm in is _____ .

(Phrase using descriptive adjectives)

Line 4: The scars on the surface remind me of

_____ .

(How did you get your scars? You can be literal or figurative.)

Line 5: In my _____ (color) eyes, I see

_____ .

(What do you see when you look into in your eyes?)

Line 6: Like _____ .

(Simile to describe what you see)

Line 7: In my smile OR frown (circle one), I feel

_____ .

(What does your smile or frown show about you?)

Line 8: _____

Example of alliteration that relates to or continues to add meaning to Line 7

Line 9: From my lips, I say

(What message do you give or want to give to the world?)

Line 10: People outside me think I'm _____.

(What do others think of you?)

Line 11: In my ears, I hear _____.

(What do you hear in the outside world or at home).

Line 12: Inside my skin, I feel _____.

(How do you feel inside?)

Line 13: My skin does not always show the real me.

(You may change this line or keep it as is.)

Line 14: The real me is _____, _____,
and _____. (What are you really like inside)

Line 15: Someday, I will LOVE /OR HATE the skin I'm in. (Choose one and circle it or write a new ending line for your poem.)

If you haven't already, use the template to copy your rough draft into your journals. You will be able to make edits and additions there. You may also wish to draw a self-portrait or another piece of art that reflects you to go along with your writing.

After completing your rough draft, it is very helpful to review some of the "The Skin I'm In" poems written by students just like you. These poems might inspire you, or as you saw with the "I Am From," they might also help guide you in your own writing. As always, feel free to jot down any notes in the blank space on the page. The questions provided after each poem will help you focus your reading, as well as, aid you in writing the second draft of your "The Skin I'm In" piece.

Journal #13

The Skin I'm In (6th grade)

I am the charming bull running for the red flag.
I am like the heavenly notes you can't deny.
I feel confident even when I walk through the shadow of death.
I am the odds and the even.
The storm clouds in the midnight sky.
The skin I'm in is lovely, faithful, passionate, and comfortable.
The scars remind me of fathers dying and babies being born, the beginning and end.
In my brown eyes, I see innocence and help, like a mother bear keeping its cub warm.
Or a baby before his first lie.
In my own smiles and frowns I see up's and down's.
Looks may not always look nice but, nevertheless love is never ugly.
From my lips I say to the world:
being urban is a great part of African-American culture,
but being ghetto is not,
There is nothing cool about ignorance, rudeness, or being uneducated.
People outside me think I'm weak, and that they are better than me.
In my ears, I hear the POW! BANG!
violence of outside the world.
At home I hear vicious words of hate and prejudice.
Inside my skin I feel confident, strong, and positive.
My skin doesn't show the real me.
The real me is peaceful, cheerful, and quiet.
Some day soon I'll love the skin I'm in.

Journal #14

The Skin I'm In (6th grade)

I am passion
I am a beautiful and creative child
Searching for love and acceptance
The skin I'm in is ashamed and scared of the outside world.
Afraid that the past might come back up to the surface.
The scars on the surface remind me of my childhood days:
Days when people didn't love me or want to keep me around.
My scars reflect the homes I've had all over town.
In my beautiful dark eyes, I see hurt and fear,
Like a wounded bird who can no longer fly.
In my smile, I feel like I am lying,
Angrily hiding my fear and pain.
From my lips, I say, "What will happen next to me? Hasn't it already been done?"
People outside of me think I'm rude and disrespectful,
But they don't know it's just a wall
To make sure no one can get in and hurt me.
In my ears, I hear people arguing inside my home,
And outside, the sirens ring.
Inside my skin, I feel like I am bleeding
And red.
So, you see, my skin does not always show the real me
The real me is hurt and confused,
Crying for help
But still smiling, hiding behind teeth and lips.
Someday, I will love the skin I'm in.

1) Have you ever felt like either of the writers from these poems? What did you do to get through your challenges?

Curriculum Connection:

2) Both of these poems contain examples of several different types of figurative language. List two and write an example of each from the poems.



Journal #15

The Skin I'm In (7th grade)

I am anonymous, bold, dark and creative.
The skin I'm in is dark and deep like the ocean.

The scars on my face remind me of my of empty childhood days

Looking for my father out on the streets
Wearing only a diaper, tears streaming down my face.

In my hollow eyes, I still see those tears
Building up inside like towers.

In my smile, I see secrets,
Silent, shameful secrets.

From my lips I say: "why be you when you can be someone else?"

Why act like yourself when you can act like someone else?"

People outside of me think I'm considerate and ambitious

But they're wrong

My mind is filled with wrong thoughts.

In my ears, I hear yelling and arguing coming from the left and the right, bouncing through my brain like ping pong balls.

But who really listens to an 11 year old?

Inside my skin, I feel quiet and angry

My skin does not show the real me

The real me is hiding

Deep down inside of me

Waiting to arrive.

Someday I will love the skin I'm in

Only God knows when.

Journal #16

The Skin I'm In (7th grade)

I am smart,

Mature in serious situations

Shy around those I don't know

And lacking in self confidence.

The skin I'm in looks like everyone else's around me,

But marked with the pain of the past.

The scars on the surface remind me of how much I have grown.

In my brown eyes, glazed over with darkness,

I see

Despair, bottled up fear

Wrapped in plastic with a label, "who cares?"

Feeling like an autumn leaf before its fall.

In my smile, I see knowledge,

Shackled by the chain of social phobia

Held down by dislike, disdain, distrust, disappointment.

Who likes a smart girl, anyway?

From my lips, I say what people expect me to say.

People outside of me think I'm abnormal,

Like the misshapen candy in bag of perfects.

In my ears, I hear leaves rustling

Wrestling with the sound of sobs

Inside my skin, I feel like i should be doing something more important

With myself

Than just this stuff here.

1) When you are feeling down on yourself like the writers of these poems, where can you turn for help?

Curriculum Connection:

2) Choose one of the poems above. What is the writer of the poem's internal conflict? Have you ever felt this way?

You are now ready to write the second draft of your "The Skin I'm In" poem. Be sure to be as descriptive as possible and to include details that are unique to you. Remember, you may use ideas from the poems that you read in this book, just make sure that you make them your own. Each one of us is unique, and this is your chance to showcase you.

CHAPTER TWO

You Think You Know, But Do You Really Know Me?

Writing About Teen Challenges

In the first chapter of this book, you got to explore yourself and what makes you a unique individual. As you shared your writing with your classmates, did you also learn about things that you have in common? Did you realize these commonalities before you shared your writing piece or listened to the work on someone else? One theme that you will encounter throughout your experience with Writers Matter is that while each individual has a story to tell, our collective stories are more similar than we may realize, and strength comes with numbers. While many adults may claim to understand you or to remember what life was like when they were your age, teens like you often feel like your voice is unheard. This feeling may cause you to question: You think you know me, but do you really know? That is where the basis for this chapter comes from-- from the experience of middle school and of being a teen.

To begin, consider that nearly everyone who reads this book is in middle school or early high school. The trials and tribulations of students your age are like a glue that binds you together. They also leave a lot open for thought, discussion and of course, for writing. Writing is the best outlet for the problems that you may experience as an adolescent, so don't be afraid to cry, laugh, reminisce or really lash out in your writing. You never know-- you might just feel better once the words have spilled out of your heart and mind and onto the paper.

As you begin brainstorming for your next piece of writing, consider many of the topics that afflict students your age. On the following page, read each of the challenges listed in the left hand column of the table. Then, in the right hand column of the table, jot down any ideas or examples of how this challenge has affected you. If this challenge hasn't affected you, simply write "N/A" or "Not Applicable" in the right-hand column. Be honest with yourself, though, and try to include as much description of each example as possible. Remember that the more high quality your brainstorm is, the better your writing may become in the end.

“You Think You Know” Brainstorming

| CHALLENGE | HOW IT RELATES TO ME |
|--|----------------------|
| Not feeling like you belong or fit in with others | |
| Issues with friends | |
| Pain in family life | |
| Feeling like your voice isn't being heard | |
| Having secrets | |
| Feeling judged by others | |
| Feeling like no one understands you | |
| Having anger issues/a short temper/ snapping on others | |
| Worrying about body image or clothes | |
| Being bullied or bullying others | |
| Peer pressure | |
| Being different (and being comfortable or uncomfortable with yourself) | |

After brainstorming your ideas, you may want to discuss what you have written with a partner, your teacher or in a small group. As you discuss your ideas, jot down any details that come to you as you talk about your experience or any ideas that you may have from listening to the experiences of others. Then, try to choose one idea to focus on in your writing piece. When you write, it is important to narrow your topic so that your writing doesn't lose focus and become too confusing. By sticking with one idea, your writing becomes more meaningful and you are able to explore your thoughts more fully.

Before you begin to write your rough draft, read through the real student poems on the following pages. As you did in Chapter One, feel free to jot down any notes in the blank space next to each of the poems. As you read, carefully consider and respond to each of the questions that follow the poems. Also, as you read, remember that you are not alone in your struggles. Just like you, many teens are experiencing similar situations, so don't be afraid to step outside of your comfort zone. You are in a safe space when you write.

Journal #17

Do You Really Know Me? (8th grade)

Do you really know me?

Or do you only know what's skin deep?

Do you know when I'm hurting?

Or, do you assume that by the way I dress,
That I'm trying to have everyone impressed,

With my appearance?

Maybe you only know what I'm willing to show.

Can you look into my eyes and see the hurt, pain, and anger?

That was made to build me, but will also break me.

Can you tell when I'm bleeding from my soul,
with cracks in my heart,

Hurt in my eyes and fear on my breath.

Or do you only know what's skin deep.

And with that I say:

You don't know me

No matter how I might appear.

Why is it that you're so quick to say you know me,

When you've only gotten to know my outer shell?

You can't judge me.

You can't sit here and tell me you know me,

Without knowing the things that made me who I am,

The things that made me the strong person I am.

So I say no one can break me,

I say you don't know me,

No matter how I might appear.

Journal #18

Ms. Unknown (7th grade)

So quiet and lonely
No one to talk to
She can't see anything,
Everything is vague
She's too quiet
She is so lonely
Who is this she?
Who is this Ms. Unknown?
She wants to look and stare
She wants to mumble and talk under her
breath
To stop stumbling and stand up confidently.
Who is she?
Who is this Ms. Unknown?
She's too emotional
She cries and gets mad too quickly
She laughs and then gets sad
She's like a roundtrip train
Always back to the same place again
Who is this she?
This she is me,
Trying not to remain unknown.

Journal #19

Do You Really Know Me? (8th grade)

Do you really know me?
The life I live, the goals I wish to
accomplish, or the things that I go through?
Do you really know me,
From the inside out to my daily
whereabouts, running the streets like a
stray cat searching for its food?
Do you really know me,
From the looks I have or the clothes I wear?
Do you really know,
From crying nearly every night wishing for
God to give me one more sight?
Do you really know me,
From a girl that has had a rough childhood?
Do you really know me,
From cops coming to my house to arrest
my family members?
Do you really know me,
From a girl that's been struggling to get
through and just fit in?
Do you really know me,
From waking up every morning and hoping
I won't be the next victim?
Do you really know me,
From not knowing why my father left me?
Do you really know me,
From a girl who used to lie to boys about
her age?
Do you really know me,
From the type of choices that I make?
You say you know me,
But do you really know?

1) What advice would you give to the writer of Journal #18?

2) What is the effect of the repetition of the line, "Do you really know me" in Journal #19?

Curriculum Connection:

3) What type of figurative language is represented by the line, "Running around like a stray cat looking for its food?" What does this line mean?

Journal #20

Rumors (8th grade)

Nowadays news travels fast,
He said, she said
Spreads around like a forest fire
People get burned too
The most talked about stuff is just a rumor
Which has been spread from one false
source
People automatically believe things even
when they know it is not true
Then make false accusations and spread
them too
Things that people say and do hurt the
ones that thought
You were true
It's funny how things come and go, to and
from an unknown
Source that you think you'll never know, but
in the end when all is clear, you'll find out
through the process of elimination is
that the source is
never near here.

Journal #21

Is it Me (8th grade)

Look at me
You may think you see who I really am
But you'll never know me
I don't want to feel pain inside anymore
I don't want to look in the mirror and say
how do I look?
Do I look pretty? Am I up to par?
I don't want to say is it me on my knees?
Trying to climb a tree
I don't want to feel jealousy seeing another
human being
Trying to enjoy their time while they can,
because unlike me they don't seem to
deserve misery.
I have good days and I also have the worst
Every time I cry or get mad I just want to
burst
I hold pain inside because I thought it would
be better but it's really just a curse
I'm trying to do better for me but it just
makes me cry
my family is hard work.
Nowadays we have problems only because
I'm a child
As time flies by I sometimes lie
Sometimes living in the truth is worse.

1) Have you ever been the victim of a rumor? Or have you spread a rumor? What happened?

Curriculum Connection:

2) What is the mood of Journal #21? What is one piece of evidence from the text led you to your response?

Journal #22

Tired of Being Bullied - Inspired by Maya Angelou (8th grade)

For the girl that has to stand alone.
For the girl that feels out of place.
For the girl that does not eat because she looks down on herself.
For the girl that's not afraid to be herself.
For the girl that feels guilty.
For the girl that feels great.
For the girl that laughs and cries.
I write this for you.
I write this for all the girls in America.
I write this for all the girls in the world.
For the girl that does not look the way the world wants her to, but in return does not care.
For the girl that hates herself.
For the girl that is called fat,
Tired of Being Bullied
You are pretty not just on the outside but also within.
For the girl that is called ugly
You are a diamond in the rough.
For the girl that they say has nothing, everyone has one special talent.
Listen to me.
For it's the reach of your arms.
The span of your hips.
The stride of your step and,
The curl of your lips.
You are a woman, Phenomenal.

Journal #23

The Cracks in Between (6th grade)

Like a concrete sidewalk
The cracks in between my life used to be wide
Now the cracks in between are strongly held together
All the rumbles and little pieces of rocks
Symbolize the obstacles I went through
The cracks in between never hide the secrets
and the lies that stand between
The cracks in between go deep into
The heart of life
The cracks in between tell it all from
Not having a father, to people in my
Family not going to college
The cracks in between are the smoke from
the lungs, they are the heart and soul from
The ancestors that come before
The cracks in between show how I've
Changed, it shows passion and desire
The cracks in between show the courage
and how
It's used
The cracks in between show the belief,
The love, the grandparents, the great
grandparents,
Mothers, fathers, the children
The cracks in between show the pain, the
hurt, the blood, the bruises, the abuse
The cracks in between show that you
matter
They show that your voice matters,
The cracks in between tell a story, a
Story about being together
About being a family
The cracks in between tell the story of the
life of one.

1) Both of these poems list many challenges that happen to students of your age. Why do you think life provides so many challenges to teens?

Curriculum Connection:

2) What is the theme of Journal #22?

Journal #24

They Say, I Say (6th grade)

They say
I am black
I say
I am black and beautiful
They say
I'll never make anything of myself
I say I will be a light bright in the sky
They say I'm not smart in my actions
I say everyone makes mistakes
They say
I'm "Ms. Know It All"
I say
At least I know how to reach my goals
I am ambitious and
Know that success is important
So
Don't judge me by skin complexion
Because I am gorgeous
There is much more to be revealed.
I say
Stop hating and judging me
Don't fling your words after me.
They say you're not really who you think
Instead, I say
I'm gonna keep being me and hold my head
up high
To love me is my prize and to be me is
difficult.
But the path leads to my place in the sky.

Journal #25

...Etc... (8th grade)

I give up, I give up, I JUST GIVE UP
It always turns out this way
Even when I try not to show it
Or let myself feel it
It always happens to me.
Why Me?
What did I do wrong this time?
Why is this never happening to people I
know?
I'm beginning to think that
Maybe I'll just never be happy
Stay the same
Sad and
Lonely
Playing someone else's game
Is there something wrong with me?
I try to change
I really try
Change my thoughts
(Is it possible?)
Change my friends
I try to hang out with people not like me
(Who can be successful at being someone
else?)
Change the way I look
(But that never works)
Change my personality
(That's hard to do too)
Change my hair
(Grandma says you can't change what God
gave ya)
All I wanted to do was feel happy
But I can never stop worrying about what
people think,
Or how they feel about me
Even if it's people I don't care about.
Why, Why, Why, Why, Why?
I keep going on living and ...etc...

1) Do you think that people are usually fair or judgmental in today's society? Why do you think so?

2) Write your own set of "They Say, I Say lines" below. You may add them to your poem later if you choose to do so.

They say I am _____.

I say I am _____.

Journal #26

Covered Pain (8th grade)

I smile because I deserve to.
But it's fake
Covering all the pain I feel inside,
Like a coat of paint
On a wall of graffiti
There are just too many problems for one
child to solve
Our parents say we've got it good,
But do we really?
What are we comparing our lives to?
They just don't know all the pain we go
through.
All the trouble we can find;
From drugs to violence
Gangs and jail
To peer pressure and the daily grind
I just don't understand how
People can be so cold.
I don't understand
How people can have kids and show them
no love.
How we can be so much the same
But only see our differences
I believe that no one really knows
All the pain we go through.
No one really knows that every smile is
filled with pain,
An untreated cavity
Hidden inside.
No one knows what we really wish for.
Why is appearance everything?
Even our own mothers don't see our
beauty.
Why don't our insides mean anything?
When will it be the thought that matters?
Not the looks.
But the insides that count.

Journal #27

Through Your Eyes, I See Me (8th grade)

You call me a name, I call you one back
It's like shooting a mirror repeatedly, but the
bullet bounces back.
You make fun of me because of what I
wear.
So I do the same.
You hit me, you punch me,
And I fight you back
Until eventually
I fall to the ground
I try to stand up, but you knock me back
down
I see hate and fury in your eyes.
You give me the stare of death and despise
I think to myself why do you choose to do
this to me?
I did nothing to you.
I try to fight back, but you call for backup
I slip through their crab-like claws and
angry faces,
As I crawl to a place inside of a space.
I walk home in pain with warm tears down
my face
As the path I am walking gets blurry and
confused
I walk not run but I'm out in a hurry.
You hate me on Facebook and flame me on
Twitter.
Now my life has gotten even more bitter
It's like I can't get away from you
Don't you have anything better to do?
I lay on my bed and cry myself to sleep
Do you know that because of you I do this
every day?
It's not just a role that I portray.
But when I look at you, sometimes I see me
too.

1) Have you ever been like the author of Journal #27? Have you treated someone the way that the writer describes?

Curriculum Connection:

2) What is one theme that the author of Journal #26 uses in his poem?

Journal #28

I'm Done (7th grade)

I'm done with you.

I'm done with me.

All that happened last year is history.

I'm done being your "Go Get It Girl"

You can go get it

Yourself.

I'm done with people yelling at me.

It's time I start yelling back.

I'm done with excuses when I know excuses are the

Tools of the incompetent,

which build monuments of Nothing.

I'm done with what other people say when it's only a matter of
Opinion.

I'm serious.

This is not the kind of done like when your mom or dad says this is their last pack
when we all know that's a lie.

I talk a good talk, don't I?

But we all know humans are creatures of habit.

So I'm done.

But I know I'll never be finished.

1) What are some of the ways that the writers of these pieces can handle the struggles that they are going through?

2) What are some of the positive aspects of life at your age?

3) Which of the poems in this chapter was your favorite poem? Why is this your favorite?

Curriculum Connection:

4) What is the most common tone of the poems in this chapter? Why do you think that this is the most popular tone in this group of pieces?

You are now ready to write the rough draft of your "You Think You Know Me" piece. Use the Brainstorming Guide that you completed at the beginning of the chapter to help you get started. When you are finished writing your rough draft, share your work with a partner. Use your partner's suggestions, as well as the revision ideas on the following page to write a final draft of your work.

“You Think You Know” Revision Guide

Use this guide to aid you in revising your piece for publication. You may wish to use the guide to help you peer edit someone else’s work as well.

1) Count your lines/sentences and write how many you have here: _____

Did you meet the required number of lines that your teacher set? _____

2) Highlight a SIMILE in your writing. If you don’t have one, add one. If you already have one, add another, or consider challenging yourself and adding several. Write your simile here: _____

3) What is the theme, or main message, of your writing:

4) Put a star (*) next to your 3 best lines.

5) Put a minus sign (-) next to your 3 worst lines. Then, revise these lines to make them better by doing one or more of the following:

- Rewrite the lines completely
- Use the thesaurus to choose better words
- Add figurative language to the line (metaphor, alliteration, personification, hyperbole, onomatopoeia)

9) Give your piece a creative title and write it here: _____

10) Check your line breaks to make sure that you account for pauses where you want them to be

11) Add rhythm to one of your lines by adding alliteration

12) Choose one of your most important ideas and repeat it more than once throughout your piece

13) Ask a question in your piece to engage your reader

14) Use part of a quote or a piece of a line from a famous poem or poet that relates to your piece and put quotation marks around it

CHAPTER THREE

Family Matters

After reading about the challenges of other students your age, as well as exploring those of your own, it is time to think about another topic that “hits home,” literally, for all of us. While our experiences with family are as varied as our identities themselves, for each one of us, family is important. Today, families come in all different sizes, with different backgrounds, and unique histories. Some families stay together, while others grow apart, but no matter what situation you face with your family: Family matters-- it just does.

It is important to realize that what makes someone part of a “family” may be different from traditional notions of the idea of family. All families are different and their variety is important to recognize. Many of us think that family ties are blood ties, but that is often not the case. Some people even consider their closest friends as a part of their family. We all have a strong need to be loved by those around us. We want unconditional love-- love that never goes away-- and look to our families to provide this need for us.

Unfortunately, it also seems like the ones we love the most are the ones who hurt us the most. So, with family, often comes many challenges. Although many family challenges are real and never seem to end, it is important to deal with them in an effective way. As you have seen in the previous two chapters to this book, writing is a very effective way to acknowledge and explore the issues that affect us the most.

With that in mind, for this writing piece you will be asked to listen closer to your inner voice and pay attention to what it tells you about family matters in your life. Often we have to confront pain head-on, but sometimes it is just as important to recognize the positive aspects of family life, as well.

As you begin brainstorming for your next piece of writing, listen to your inner voice and write down some of the thoughts and feelings that come from that voice. On the following page, read each of the family matters categories listed in the left hand column of the table. Then, in the right hand column of the table, jot down any ideas or examples of how this family matter is evident in your life. As always, stay true to your truth and don't be afraid to take risks in your writing.

“Family Matters” Brainstorming

| FAMILY MATTER | HOW IT RELATES TO ME |
|---|----------------------|
| Living without a father | |
| Living without a mother | |
| Siblings who get into trouble | |
| Not knowing some of your siblings (never met them or otherwise) | |
| Abuse from family members (physical or emotional) | |
| Divorce or separation | |
| Not having enough money or food | |
| Family member in jail | |
| Family member with mental illness or addiction | |
| A family that is still together | |
| A single parent | |
| Moving from place to place (whole family moving, being in foster care or other) | |
| Not feeling like you fit in or are understood by the rest of your family | |

After brainstorming your ideas, you may again want to discuss what you have written with a partner, your teacher or in a small group. If you are still thinking about what to write or what is meant by “Family Matters,” read through the student examples and jot down any ideas or inspiration that they may provide for you.

As you read, carefully consider and respond to each of the questions that follow the poems. These questions will help narrow your reading focus and will also help you relate to each of the writers. Just like in the “You Think You Know” chapter, you may realize that you or your friends experience many of the same situations faced by the writers in this chapter. When something seems familiar, write down your ideas on the topic on your brainstorming chart or in your journal. Remember, it’s up to you to tell the important story of your life to the world.

Journal #29

Listen To Me (6th grade)

“Leave a message after the beep.” (BEEP)

Then all I hear is silence

Dad, I don’t have time for you to talk now- just like you haven’t had all these years

I walk in fear everyday

You make my sun go away

I need you to look at my shadow

I want you to listen to me

And I need you to read the tone of my voice

Daddy, I have fear on things that you do to Tavis, mom, and me

Because of you, I keep my door closed

I feel scared when I’m around you

This is true.

Are you listening?

I need you to listen to me

You always say that you know me

But now you are going to see me

I can’t sleep because I think of you

But I want to think about something new

Dad, I need you to listen to me

The voice on the other line:

“If you are satisfied with your call press “1” or hang up now.”

(CLICK)

1) Why do you think this student chose to tell about her relationship with her father through a phone message?

2) Have you ever experienced anything similar to what this writer has experienced?

Journal #30

The Mystery of My Father (6th grade)

I'm sitting here thinking what to write about when it's clear that the main wrong in my life is growing up without a father. So, let's get it started...

Growing up
Without a father is terrible
I am like the weed left after a
beautiful flower
Has wilted and the petals have fallen

D
o
w
n
When I say my daddy died, people have
sympathy
Why?
I wonder, do you really care?
But I'm solemn either way.

My daddy, Johnny, died when I was 7, but before that, he never really spent time with me. I don't even know my dad's last name (not mine) but before you judge me:

Don't think I'm a child that falls
Because my life now is as beautiful as a
water fall
So before you even say I've been through it
all
Just know I will continue standing high,
mighty and tall.
My heart stays.

It's just that little spot where my dad was
supposed to be, but in the end, I guess it's
filled by my mom and me.

Journal #31

Daddy Gone - A Rap (6th grade)

Cold world
Daddy gone
Try to make up this paper to get my
momma strong

Yea, I'm writing rap
Trying to find where daddy at

He didn't tell how to treat a girl
Now momma's telling me I don't even need
a girl
Now you got me in the house with all these
girls
And if I had a poppa he would change my
world

Yea, I'm writing rap
Trying to find where daddy at

Yea, and I'm searching everywhere
But I still can't find my daddy anywhere
Now you got me and mommy by ourselves
And you got her paying for all my health
I'm the man of the house at only 12

Yea, I'm writing rap
Trying to find where daddy at

One day you were gone without a trace
Even when you were here, always on
momma's case
You used to be my role model
Thinking about you is taking it's toll

Angry and
Finishing up the end of this rap
'Cuz I still don't know where my daddy at.

1) These poems both focus on life without a father. Compare and contrast the way each poem presents this challenge.

Curriculum Connection:

2) What does the author mean when she finishes her metaphor with: "I guess it's filled by my mom and me?"

Journal #32

A Warrior's Poem (6th grade)

Every once in a while, someone is born to
be a hero.
A tiny baby just detached from her mother.
Barely lets out a cry.
Foreshadowing of an eleven year old self.
Chameleon eyes, freckles sprinkled on her
face and a beautiful smile...

Summer lunch time: a knock on the door.
A plain-faced villain came to take us away.
No time to say goodbye.
Sitting next to my sister in a big white van,
It seemed like my past was blurred together
with the buildings we passed,
Riding down the street away from my family
and friends.
In that blur, I put on my cape.

Since then, I have been through things,
Things you can never imagine.
From shelter to shelter, home to home.
Looking for a place to make my own.

I have to tell you:
It is hard being me.
I don't have my big sister around to
whisper:
"Everything is going to be okay."
Unwanted for her attitude.
Feeling depressed
Like I'm alone in the world.
And a visit once a week.

Journal #33

Family Challenges (7th grade)

Have you ever felt
Like you were neglected
Not seen, not heard
Or even disrespected
By your own father
Who's supposed to care
Who's supposed to love you,
protect you
Buy you your first teddy bear
But he turns his back on you
Leaves you out in the cold
Without even a hug
Or someone to hold
Leaves you wondering "What did I do
wrong?"
Has you crying, sobbing
Listening to sad songs
You hate him
He abandoned his own daughter
You often have dreams
Of murder, even slaughter
You want him to feel
The hurt he put you through
But I know how you feel
Because I feel it, too.

1) Which Family Matters topic is Journal #32 about? How can you tell?

2) Can you relate to the students in either of these journals? What is your advice to either of them?

Curriculum Connection:

3) The poet of Journal #32 uses several metaphors in her writing. Write one of them here and explain its meaning.

Journal #36

You Came Back (6th grade)

Gone.

Why would you do that?

I was mad for years.

I don't get it, you left and didn't care.

Why would you do that?

I looked up to you.

You were my hero.

You were always there.

But when you left, I didn't know what to do.

I think I made my mind up...I hate you.

After these few years I wanted to know.

Kept waiting...and waiting but you didn't show.

When you came back, I was glad.

You step up...start being a dad.

I know you live far, but we get in contact.

We text, we call, we do all of that.

Thank you, God, for answering my prayers,
you're back!

Don't leave again, or I'll never forgive you.

You're lucky this time because I love you.

You didn't want to hurt me or do any harm.

But now I gave you the key to my heart,
and you came back

With open arms.

Journal #37

The Power of Pain (6th grade)

Do you love me?

Or do you hate me?

You're making me so confused,

We used to laugh,

And now in place of the smiles,

There are tears

In place of laughing with me, you hit me,

You buy me stuff the world wants,

But not what I want,

Do you even know what I like?

You buy me stuff in pink,

Not in yellow,

Why do you drag me to places I don't want
to go to?

Now you say I can't go to malls with you,

All you do is make me hate myself more

and more,

Like who I am and what I want isn't good
enough

You make fun of my skin because you're
pale,

But I am the blood of your blood

Can't you see it?

You say I'm rude and disrespectful,

But I got it from you,

I copy you so I can be a woman,

Because I'm your only daughter,

But are you the woman I should be trying to
be?

More and more, I'd rather just be me.

1) Do you think that writing these poems may have helped these students? Why or why not?

2) If the student from Journal #37 gave you her journal to respond to in class, what would you say after reading her piece?

Curriculum Connection:

3) What is the author's tone in Journal #37?

Journal #38

Black & Blue (8th grade)

I'm Black & Blue.

Battered and bruised.

What are you going to do to help me?

To help me you'd need to know black and blue

Like I know black and blue,

Like the back of my mother's black hand

On my black face,

Battered and bruised,

Shattered and abused.

What are you going to do to help me?

To help me you'd need to know black and blue

Like I know black and blue.

Like the black body hanging in my brother's room,

An unfamiliar shade of blue.

Battered and bruised.

What are you going to do to help me?

Journal #39

Leukemia (8th grade)

Bright orange.

The color of the ribbon.

His ribbon.

Bright orange and seemingly harmless.

His already slim frame

Growing thinner.

Losing Energy by the moment.

His bald head betraying his age and youthfulness.

The truth of

The matter too hard

To swallow or explain

With words, so bright

Orange must suffice.

Bright orange.

My brother.

Tough as a soldier.

Strong as a boulder.

His faith can't be shifted.

His spirits high lifted.

My strong little brother.

I love like no other.

Bright orange.

Like hope for my brother's life.

- 1) Both of these poems incorporate color to describe their thoughts and feelings. Is there a color that you associate with your family matter? If so, which one and why?

Curriculum Connection:

- 2) The author of journal #39 uses similes to emphasize her brother's strength. Write a simile of your own to add to your Family Matters piece. Then, explain it's meaning.

A Person Who Never Quits



Journal #40

His New Home (7th grade)

Fade in: Interior: New Jersey Detention Center. "Jerry, Jerry!" The rowdy crowd cheers him on, hoping for some action to break up their boring day. Guards watch over the prisoners like a pack of hyenas hunting down their prey. The open field is nearly empty like a drip of soda left in a can, a lone chip wrapper blowing in the wind. Prisoners wait for their free time, having to share a room like brothers. Living inside their dark, boring, newspaper-walled rooms decorated with tally marks to keep track of days spent. Almost everything is salvaged from somewhere else. This is the home of criminals charged with murder, robbery, drug-dealing. Not a place for fathers who love their daughters. This is not a new home for my father.

1) Why are many of the situations in these pieces so unfair? Do you think there might be another side of the story?

2) Which of the pieces in this chapter was your favorite? Why is this your favorite piece?

3) Do you think that having tough times in our lives make us stronger or weaker? Explain your answer.

Curriculum Connection:

4) Think of an object that you own or something that is in your home. Personify this object and write a few sentences to tell the story of your situation through the point of view of the object. What does it think, feel, see or hear when you are experiencing this "family matter?"

You are now ready to write the rough draft of your "Family Matters" piece. Use the Brainstorming Guide that you completed at the beginning of the chapter to help you get started. Now that you have reached the third writing piece of this book, don't be afraid to take more risks with your writing and really bear your soul. This is what becoming an emerging writer and teenage is all about. As you grow, you take risks and step outside of your comfort zone to learn more about yourself and further shape your identity. Use this opportunity to write about the people who matter most to you-- your family.

CHAPTER FOUR

Where I've Been, Where I'm Going *Dreams, Aspirations and the Future*

In the previous three chapters of this book, you've explored topics that relate to your past and present. In Chapter Four, "Where I've Been, Where I'm Going," you will have the opportunity to examine your future. Perhaps unlike the past three writing pieces, this piece lends itself to be much more positive. Obviously, thinking about the future can sometimes seem daunting. It is an intimidating task for even the bravest of people because we never know what the future has in store for us. But, it is important to consider the future and ponder the decisions that you might be faced with as you grow older.

By the time you reach middle school, you have already been asked the often dreaded question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" In fact, you have probably been asked it so many times that your answer may have changed dozens of times. Or perhaps, you really don't know. Who does really know what they want to be ten or twenty years from now? As you can see from what we have read and written so far in this book, people change a lot through the years. You can only expect these changes to continue throughout your life.

Still, all of us have dreams and ambitions. Some people dream concrete dreams-- that is, they know exactly what they want and who they want to be. Others dream in more abstract ways. For example, you may know that you want success and happiness in your future, but there are many ways to attain those qualities in your life. In fact, psychologists at the University of Pennsylvania have actually discovered that writing about our dreams for the future can help to make us happier in the present. You may even find yourself daydreaming about the future. For this reason, even despite all of its uncertainty, the future is exciting. It's time to move forward and to give your future all that you have inside. Your future, and the world, is waiting.

As you begin brainstorming for your next piece of writing, don't hold back. We can only become what we allow ourselves to dream about. Think about each prompt on the following pages and answer honestly. They often say the future is limitless, so don't let your dreams, or your writing, become limited.

“Where I’m Going” Brainstorming

In five years, I
see myself...

In ten years, I
see myself...

My greatest goal
for the future is...

The person I look
up to most is...
because...

I show that I am
committed to my
future by...

“Where I’m Going” Brainstorming

I want others to remember me for...

The values I want to stick to in my life are...

In my future, I want to change...

My past helps shapes my future by...

My number one dream in life is...

“Where I’m Going” Brainstorming

It is important
not to give up on
dreams because...

The people I see
in my future
are...

In order to reach
my goals, my plan
is to...

One thing that
worries me about
the future is...

To make my
future brighter,
today I will...

After brainstorming your ideas, you may want to discuss what you have written with a partner, your teacher or in a small group. As you discuss your ideas, remember to listen carefully to the ideas of others and their responses to your ideas. We can all learn to become better by listening to one another.

Before you begin to write your rough draft, read through the real student poems on the following pages. As you did in the previous, feel free to jot down any notes in the blank space next to each of the poems. As you read, carefully consider and respond to each of the questions that follow the poems. If something inspires you, make your own and use it to enhance your rough draft.

Journal #41

My Dream (7th grade)

Do you know my dream when I get older?

I hope I succeed and change the world because this world is getting colder.

My dream is to become a basketball player.

A lot of people are going to hate, that's why they call them haters,

You don't have to wait: do it sooner rather than later.

People open up and close on you like a folder.

A lot of people don't care so they shrug their shoulders.

This world has a lot of hatred

Don't try to fight it, just face it.

Don't trip on your shoe strings, lace it.

Achieving a goal is easy if you believe in yourself,

It will feel like you're going around the world like a belt.

They say, "Hard work is paid off"

And it's true, it felt like you made a lot of success.

Don't try to be all in the Kool-Aid, you don't want to be in the mess.

Making the last second buzzer beater can feel good inside

Always play with confidence and stay on your feet

You can always be hot like the Miami Heat.

People going to always hate

But, don't care about them, give it your all and when you win say,

"Check mate."

Journal #42

The Dream Lives On (7th grade)

Dr. King once spoke his dream,
He stated, "I have a dream that one day my
children will not be judged by the color of
their skin but by the content of their
character."

I, too, have that dream.

I have a dream that I can show people,
That color is not everything
You have to look under the hood to see
what's inside.

I have a dream that what my ancestors
fought for,

Equality, everyone could have.

People need to understand

Your color or race can make you

No better or worse than anyone else.

I have this dream that I could just show
people

How strong of an impact racism has,

That racism is not just someone saying they
Dislike you because of your race.

It destroys lives,

Keeps them in poverty,

People will try to better themselves,

And their families, and put themselves

In better situations but can't

Because of something as simple as their
racial identity.

Racism leads to many harmful things,

Such as depression, and all types of

violence

Even to wars extent.

I have a dream that one of these days

Everyone of every color would hold hands,
like in that poster that hangs in classrooms,

Around the world and stop racism

Racism has a very strong ripple effect

It doesn't affect just one person

It affects us all

Racism is just that strong

And can start with only one word: HATE.

I have a dream that one day

The ripple effect will stop,

The falling dominoes,

That started with one word will be still,

And that all racism will come to a peaceful
halt,

And we can all live in harmony and unity.

1) Do you think that this writer could influence the world to change its ways? Why or why not?

Curriculum Connection:

2) What is the author's tone in this poem? Explain your response.

Journal #43

Salvaged from History, Looking Into the Future (6th grade)

"We have rights!"

I can hear the voices of the protestors inside of my head.

Like an evaporated once distinct ocean, many are now dead.

"I have a dream!"

He gave a speech with the help of his team.

"Follow me, come this way."

Travel on the Underground Railroad and envision walking for more than a day!

"We will fight without violence!"

The Freedom Riders refused to remain in silence.

"I want to be as intelligent as they are!"

Before, Medgar Evers students felt as though they were below par.

"I demand respect, I will sit where I please!"

It wasn't fair, but she helped so that 21st century children would not be teased.

"I had crossed the line. I was free; but there was no one to welcome me to the land of freedom."

A stranger in a strange land, Harriet Tubman emanated courage and rose to the occasion.

In their legacy

I remember and fight for my Civil Rights, like Maya Angelou

"Still I will rise!"

Journal #44

It's Time for Change (7th grade)

I once was a darling and sweetie pie

Earning these names from my nana

Doing good deeds and always spreading love

But as I grew older

I heard the devil in my ear

I saw his pointy horns over my shoulder

I worried that my grandchildren would never be born

I thought that my life would come to a stumbling, tumbling end

But I want to change.

Now I am aggressive and sometimes judgmental

I think this comes from being a teen

I need to go to college and get good grades

I try my hardest so my future can be made

I truly forgive my dad

Now I can change.

I will change my personality

And choose to love my life and face reality

I dream that I will be a lawyer and maybe a professional dancer

I hope to be successful, to fulfill all that I aspire to be

I predict my life will be better

I know that my life will be make those around me proud

For them and for me,

I will change.

1) How have the writers of both of these pieces committed to their futures?

2) Which lines from these pieces best relate to your life and your future?

3)

Curriculum Connection:

2) What is the meaning of the idiom, "I heard the devil in my ear?"

Journal #45

Obstacles (6th grade)

Obstacles should only slow us down

Never stop us.

They try to pull us down

When we're reaching up.

Not even in

Death!

Just take a deep breath and be determined!

People will give you doubt and hate,
even when there's no one to congratulate.

Don't keep friends that keep you down,
go your own way even at the end of the day
you'll have a frown.

You could be a monarch its only obstacles
that keep you two apart.

Violence is one of the biggest like crime,
Being the suspect you'll waste time,
Being the victim you'll be all out of time.
Don't let something symbolize you always
be unpredictable.

It's hard to overcome an obstacle
There's one obstacle each and everyone of
you have FEAR!

Fearing fear itself is another big obstacle.
You'll have to overcome our fears someday,
if so you can overcome anything.

Take my advice and follow my saying:
"Obstacles should only slow us down never
stop us!"

Journal #46

What Lies Ahead (8th grade)

Twelve years old without a care in the
world,

Now I'm fifteen and looking for a cure.

I see that I've changed;

I'm broken inside,

And almost everyday lately, I've cried.

It's hard to fit into this society,

With my problems and with my anxiety.

I always used to be happy, no tears, no
scars, nothing.

But nowadays, it's always something.

I never thought I'd turn out this way,
But with tears in my eyes today I still have
the urge to say, "I'm okay!"

It's hard these days to be who you are
When society's definition of perfect is far.

It's been crazy; it's not been easy,
It's hard to think positive when it's all so
"breezy."

Friends sometimes are whom I count on,
but when I need them, they're all gone.
I love how so many things can change you,
A lot of things have changed me too.

It's difficult growing up in this generation,
It's all a "lie" with these different kinds of
faces.

I grew up involved in a lot of things,
It's hard thinking about what life brings.

I hope in the future the scenarios in my
head will come true,

I'll get to be who I want to be and not just
me

And I hope all of this for you too.

1) How is the outlook of the future different for these two writers?

2) Why is it important to never give up on ourselves and others?

Curriculum Connection:

3) What is the theme of Journal #45?

Journal #47

Story of Success (6th grade)

When I get older
I want to have success
When I get older
I want to be the best
When I get older
I want to make a change
When I get older
I want happiness in exchange
When I get older
I want to have a job
When I get older
I'ma give the money to my mom
When I get older
I want to be a role model
When I get older
I'ma show the world I matter
When I get older
I want to have a world record
When I get older
I'm leaving out the ghetto
When I get older
I want a career
When I get older I want to face my fear
When I get older
I'ma tell my child about my life
When I get older I'ma tell my story to my wife

Journal #48

I Will Shine Bright (6th grade)

They say:
Life is like a roller coaster,
It goes in circles as you wait for the fun.
Screaming and laughing
Sometimes crying when it's done.

Looking into the future
I want to be like the sun
With rays that brighten up the world
And take away feelings of sadness and depression
Hopefully the sun will come out in me today,
And shine on me too,
So I can make it in a superior way.

They say
You can't dwell on the past so
I don't care about my past,
It is the future that matters and waits.
I am going to be happy and live my life with no regrets.
It's hard to break my heart.
I love me; therefore, I know my future will be alright.

1) How is the outlook of the future similar for these two writers?

2) Do you look to your future with positivity or negativity? Why?

Curriculum Connection:

3) What is the overall mood of Journal #47?

Journal #49

Courage (8th grade)

COURAGE

what that word means to me

I will tell you in my little and short story

There once was a girl who lived down the block

And she didn't even know what courage was about

Wherever she went she was quiet and shy

Until one day when she opened up about one time

She was 12 years old and had plenty of talents

She had many, many dreams but thought life was a challenge

Everyone at school laughed and giggled

When she told them that she had knowledge

Because all they knew her for was all of her talents

At that point she believed that she wasn't taken seriously

And that she was living in a dream

That everyone else thought about hilariously

Then came one day she was walking alone and singing to the beat

That she thought of on her own

Then out of the blue she heard something that she thought was inspiring

An old lady she knew told her:

"GIRL, keep on trying, and your dreams filled with many of your talents including your knowledge will come true"

5 minutes later after she thought about it

She knew that the words that were spoken came to her from courage

And since that point she made plenty of changes

She felt brave and successful

She's not afraid to express herself whether she has

Talent

Knowledge

Or other positive traits

She

Expresses herself in every different way

So let's go back to the beginning

Courage what that word means to me

C- Change what you want to improve

O-Outstanding at what you do

U-Understood by others

R-Respected by yourself and others too

A-Astonishing

G-Great at your specialties

E-Extra, give it something nice

Courage what does that word mean to you?

Make a new change in your point of view.

1) What is the challenge that this writer faced that help to make her stronger?

2) Do you feel like you are stronger due to the challenges of your life?

Curriculum Connection:

3) What is the theme that the girl learns from the old woman in the poem?

Journal #50

Where I've Been, Where I'm Going (8th grade)

I've been stuck in drama trying to overcome it
I've been around too much bad influence trying to escape it

I've been around teenagers thinking they're cool,
Smoking and trying to change others through substance abuse

I've been the kind of kid always getting bullied just for being smart

I've been in my bed sleeping hoping this world can recover from this breaking heart

I've been around crying everyday
From being jumped by my class in 1st grade
And from coming home everyday with a fresh wound

I've been around kids with dreams who let words get the best of them

I've been around too many haters

I've been with a dad trying his best to recover from a stroke

I've been with a mom coming home from work everyday with her feet always hurting

I've been around people wanting to be my friend but then turning their back on me I've been around fights happening over very little conflict

So, where am I going?

Well, that's a good question.

I'm going to put my name in history

I'm going to feed and protect my family

I'm going to work hard and accomplish my goals

I'm going to change the world

I'm going to get stronger and stronger facing challenges that may come

I'm going to stand up tall and fight for this nation

I'm going to be successful in what I do I'm going to help others change themselves, and help them become better people too.

I'm going to fight for what I believe in

I'm going to be a role model for young children

I'm going to let my voice be heard

I'm going to stop all our nation's violence

I'm going to one day make this nation join hands

I'm going to make all my friends and family proud of me

I'm going to grow up and have a family of my own

I'm going to help the less fortunate

I'm going to stand tall as the face of this nation

I'm going to be a hero

Yes, you may not believe me but

I'm going to be a hero.

1) What does this writer's message say to you?

2) What values are important to this writer?

Curriculum Connection:

3) What can we learn from this writer?

CHAPTER FIVE

Looking Beyond Ourselves

For the past four chapters, you have really gotten to explore yourself and shape your identity through your words. You have also been given an opportunity to make your story known to the world. But, what about the world's story? So often today, people are focused inwardly and they neglect to pay attention to the issues that affect others around them. They worry more about themselves than about the well-being of others, the environment and society as a whole. While it is important to maintain your personal identity and well-being, it is also important to include making a difference in the world around you as one of your core values.

Have you ever walked down the streets of your neighborhood and witnessed something that you wish you hadn't? Perhaps it was an act of violence or animal cruelty. Perhaps it was a homeless man or woman digging through a trash can or maybe it was the trash itself strewn across the street. Perhaps you've witnessed or been the victim or perpetrator of bullying. Did you do anything about it? There are countless injustices in our society today, and as young people, it is your duty to make a change and stand up for what is right.

As a writer, you have the power to make a change-- not only through your words, but when your words are put into action. Young people have more power than they think. Through your words, your voice is heard. So, what will you do to make a change?

Reflect on your core values and beliefs. What are some of the injustices you see in the world? How can you change them? For this piece, you may want to do a little research. The following page includes a list of issues that you may want to look into before you begin writing. After examining each issue briefly, select one that you would like to focus on in your writing. You may want to choose a topic that is not included on the list-- just be sure to get approval from your teacher. Then, jot down some ideas on how you might make a change in this area. You will use these ideas later as you begin to write your rough draft of "Looking Beyond Ourselves."

Looking Beyond Ourselves Research

Access to Clean Water

Suicide

Human Trafficking

Drug Trafficking

Bullying

Homicide

Child Labor

Genocide

Epidemics/Pandemics

Gangs and Violence

Homelessness

Littering

Poverty

Pollution

Global Warming

Educational Inequality

Racism

Sexism/Genderism

War/Terrorism

Human Rights

Topic: _____

Why I Chose This Topic: _____

How I Feel About This Topic: _____

The Story of Someone Real Who is Affected By My Topic:

Three Statistics Related to My Topic:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Ways That I Can Help:

My Slogan to Raise Awareness on This Topic: _____

Journal #51

We Live in a Nation (8th grade)

We live in a nation
Where we twerk before we read
Where at the age of twelve
You have boys selling weed

We live in a nation
Where they changed the meaning of rap
Where kids are getting out of hand
So now they are talking back

But I want a nation
Where the streets are all clean
And the parents would listen and not be so mean

So let's change the nation
By creating peace
Standing up for ourselves
And getting bad people off the streets

We live in a nation
Where kids get in so many fights
Mad because they never had a dad in their life

But I want a nation
Where mommy can get off ACCESS
Where people would stop shooting
So I can finally sit on the steps

Well, I have to go
I'm running out of rhyme
But we need to fix this
We're running out of time.

Journal #52

The Right to Be Heard (8th grade)

Discrimination and prejudice are running wild
As rampant and untamed as a newborn child.
Like a ferocious beast it will not be stopped
Unless a decision is made by someone on top.

Top, top, top, like the president,
To whom good and evil should probably be evident

I hope that this is relevant:

Gays, straights, autistics, and lesbians' too-
They're all getting beat until they're black and blue.

Not just fists and punches, and bullies stealing lunches.

Words.

Splendid characters that illuminate the page
Are being used to take out hate and rage.

It's hard to believe,

To even conceive,

The things people say and do.

Let me tell you this, from me to you:

It's real.

It's there.

Oh yes.

It's true.

Something has to be done.

This disease must be cured.

I'll do this by speaking up.

I have the right to be heard.

1) Both of these authors refer to the idea of having their voices heard in society. Do you feel like your voice is heard by others? Why or why not?

Curriculum Connection:

2) What is the author's **tone** in Journal #51?

Journal #53

The Words Written On My Heart to Change the World (6th grade)

There are words written on the tip of my tongue yearning to be heard and waiting to be sung these words that fill my thoughts, that fill my dreams, they are starting to uncover the dark corners inside of me but as I open my mouth only silence forever heard.

How can we change the world without violence?

I cry for the people who passed on during the night.

Is life all about killing innocent people?

I, as in we, can change the world by moving far away from the pain that we are all going through.

We can change the world by helping people get over their fear.

We can change the world by moving away from the violence.

We all know how it feels to hear a gunshot every night.

We can change the world by making it a better place for people and children.

We know how it feels to live on the streets because of what we feel and read.

What happened to our nation?

What happened to Rosa Parks helping us fight to change the world?

How could we let violence come between us?

What did we do wrong?

What happened to the world?

We need to change it.

Why are kids afraid to walk home at night because of the crazy violence going on in this world?

How can we change the world?

We can make a change by gathering people up Let people talk about what they went through in life.

The world deserves better so let's get together And change the world that people are dying in.

We can change the world by sticking together

And making a change for the people and children

Who are dying for help.

Let's all change the world for the children.

All we need to do is stop the violence in this society.

The violence is the conflict

And changing the world is the solution.

This world is coming to an end

Let's change the world

For the dying children.

1) What is this poet's message to the world?

Curriculum Connection:

2) What is the meaning of the poet's use of **metaphor** in her title?

Journal #54

Stand Up and Save the World (6th grade)

This is how it was supposed to be now
I don't know what I see.
How did it go from
Red to black and white,
Love to hate and fights,
Free until you caught me,
Hugged to mugged and drugged,
Kissed to I hope he'll miss hitting me with his
whips,
hand and hand to "Man, you touch me and it
will be man to man."
What I want to see is a change for you and me.
Dreaming to believing,
Accomplishment no longer being astonishment
Because you've already accomplished it.
So you're used to it.
Change, it's in range.
Change, it's in chatter.
Change, it's what's expected beyond the
clouds.
Tragically, this is not what others see
I want a cause and effect situation for you and
me.
Killing to Dealing,
Failing to no longer being a surprised because
you're used to it.
It's all in the bullet to the head,
Skittles and tea,
A bowl with no food,
skin with and without color.
The computer pathetically needing a single
click,
only a single click.
To change.

Journal #55

Speak [Themselves] Out (6th grade)

Why should we brag and complain of a pain
that will fade, won't be remembered?
We should speak ourselves out.
Allow ourselves to be "heard" through writing.
For the world to become conscious and
appreciate our tribulations,
to overlook their own lives in search of ours.
Throwing the other function of them that is self-
centered,
in the garbage.
Who should understand our ethnic background
and our atrocious life?
But available problems create an [un]available
world of peace.
We shall speak ourselves out.
We're living in a life of danger,
in a world of dishonesty, violence, war, and
disregard.
Black vs. White shall be left
Underground.
6 feet to freedom.
Like
Ink vs. Paper,
without one another there's no salvation.
Inside and out, we are the world.
Like a once splintered pencil (life),
that has transformed to being the sharpest tip
sharpened.
This could be us: united.
For better or for worse, an ancestral phantasm.
Life is reality, waiting for freedom.
Our world will reverse, by speaking ourselves
out.

1) In Journal #54, the poet lists many changes that have occurred in the world. Does she see these changes as positive or negative?

Curriculum Connection:

2) The author of Journal #55 uses very sophisticated vocabulary to make her point. Write three words from her poem that you didn't know before you read it. Then, use a thesaurus to discover a **synonym** for each of these words.



Journal #56

Perfectly Made (7th grade)

What is wrong with the world we live in?
People hate on each other's ethnicity or the
color of their skin
"Don't judge a book by its cover," they say
But people judge one another by their looks
everyday
Racism has been around for so long
Most people think it's okay, but it's really wrong
This big problem is everywhere
The next person they offend will probably tear
People say names and they just don't care
These are all racist and they make me sick!
Racism leads one thing to another
Soon they'll be saying all these jokes about
their mother
All of these actions are so rude
It's very offensive, immature, and cruel
It should be stopped once and for all
There's no time to wait or stall
It doesn't get any better, but worse
People will discriminate and they will curse
There is no cure for it, but it's inside all of us
To bring peace and make the world a better
place
Even though racism has been around for so
long
It doesn't mean it can't be stopped or gone
We don't want to make the same mistake as
our grandfathers
But try to work things out and be better
Racism sometimes causes trouble and pain If
they take it personally,
they won't be the same
They will think of all the mistakes or troubles
they've caused

And will regret that they ever lived and wish it
would pause
They won't respect themselves anymore
On the outside they will act happy, but in the
inside they're torn
We need to stop and think before we act
So next time people won't feel attacked
That may be true or not
But stop doing these foolish actions, just give it
a shot!
Racism isn't a thing anyone looks forward to
It's very stupid and a waste of time to do
No one should hate each other because of
race
Even though a lot of people do it these days
So please don't contribute to this animosity
The only thing it does is prevent peace and
unity
Whether you're black, white, or beige
God made you all perfectly.

1) What is this poet trying to say to the world through her writing?

Curriculum Connection:

2) How does the author's title **foreshadow** the conclusion to her poem?

Journal #57

Difference: Making A Change (6th grade)

Who cares about the different colors of our faces

or the amount of our races

or the purpose of our religion?

I don't.

I don't care about color

I care about being trustworthy

I care about compassion, responsibility respect and honesty.

So who cares about being different?

That's what makes us, us

Not the same clothes, the same hairstyle

Difference means expressing ourselves in the way we want.

Judge by the heart, mind and soul.

Judge the inside of the book not its cover.

It's our content that makes us whole

I recommend you spend a little time giving out

Your heart and thinking in your mind.

No matter how old you are you can't waste time.

Making a change is just right.

People live life hard so give your time

A quarter, nickel, penny, or dime

If we respect one another life can be fine.

You should help to shine

You should help to make things alright.

Whether you speak English, French, Chinese, Japanese,

We can make peace in this world.

Together we are one, we own this world.

Call me when you need to get together

We stand as friends hand and hand.

Ups or downs round and round don't

Make a sound

Just listen to the pounding of the Heart

So make a change

Make a change.

Journal #58

Changing Times (7th grade)

Our world needs to change,

It needs to rearrange

Less pollution

More solution

Less violence

More tolerance

Factories for jobs,

But not for kids

Where people's lives are not up for bids,

We should try bidding on something besides lives

Like positive ideas and innovation

Our world can change,

We can clean up, and rearrange

More beauty,

And more sparkle

So we can make a change

501 world, 1 sky

Our world can go sky high.

- 1) Both of these writers refer to change in their poems. What is one change that you would like to make for the good in the coming year?

Curriculum Connection:

- 2) What is meant by the use of the **cliche**, "judge a book from it's inside, not just it's cover" in Journal #57?

Journal #59

Hatred is Blind (6th grade)

Hatred is blind and carries people away

Hatred is hidden on the corner of everyone's eyes

Hatred fades away everyday and everywhere but at the same time,

Hatred grows everywhere in every heart.

Hatred starts on the inside but as time goes by it eventually crawls through to the outside.

We are in a world filled with hatred.

Once hatred is in you,

it's hard for it to go away.

The opposite of hatred is not love it's indifference.

Hatred at times is a shadow.

A man's heart filled with hatred is cruel.

Hatred is a poison that kills you slowly.

Hatred is a game that's played by tricky minds.

Hatred eats you on the inside and then seeps out your pores.

If hatred was erased, the Holocaust, the Civil Rights movement or other events of dispute, would never have been written.

Hatred leads to violence

Drive away the hate and aim for peace

The world would be a much better place.

- 1) Why is it important to see past ourselves and realize that others are going through struggles as well?
- 2) In moving through this book and sharing your writing with others, have you found any common bonds with your classmates or with any of the writers in the book?
- 3) How can writing help young people like you share their voices with the world?
- 4) Do you think that writing about the issues that are important to you is helpful? Why or why not?

While this is the end of this book, it definitely does not mean that your writing should stop here. As you read, responded to and wrote about the topics presented in each of these chapters, you have grown both as a writer and as an individual. With each year that passes, you will continue to mature and to shape your identity in meaningful ways. Don't forget to let your writing serve as an outlet for all that you may encounter. The voice will always be inside of you-- don't forget to let it out. What you think, feel and say matters, so share it with the world... **Let your voice be heard.**

About the Authors



Erin Bloom (left) with Writers Matter Student

Erin Bloom has taught middle years Language Arts for the past seven years and has been working with Writers Matter for the past six years.. She is a graduate of Temple University with a dual degree in English and History. Ms. Bloom also has a Masters degree in Secondary Education. She became a teacher through the Philadelphia Teaching Fellows program and is the recipient of the “A Day Made Better” teaching award from Office Max. In 2014, Ms. Bloom was a contributor to the book, **Empowering Young Writers: The Writers Matter Approach**. Through her teaching, Ms. Bloom strives to instill a lifelong passion for learning, creativity, writing and scholarship in each of her students.



Bob Vogel (Center) with Writers Matter Mentors

Robert Vogel is Professor of Education, Founding Director of Writers Matter Program and Co-Director of Leadership and Global Understanding at La Salle University in Philadelphia. In addition to teaching undergraduate and graduate students for the education department he teaches travel study to countries that have traveled to Morocco, Cuba, Turkey, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Germany, Chile, Spain, Thailand, Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary. He published **Voices of Teens: Writers Matter** in 2008 and in 2014 he published with Drs. Yost and Lewinski, **Empowering Young Writers: The Writers Matter Approach**. The Writers Matter Program involves over 1500 students yearly in the United States and approximately 900 students in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. He is the recipient of the 2007 LaSalle University Provost’s Distinguished Service Award and the 2008 Distinguished Lasallian Educator’s Award. He can be reached by e-mail at vogel@lasalle.edu.