

Women's Perspectives #5

A Journal of Writings & Art by Adult Learners

What Would You Do?: Creative Ideas for Difficult Times

Pre-Writing Activities

Part 1

Exploring the Theme:

“What Would You Do?: Creative Ideas for Difficult Times”

This issue of *Women's Perspectives* encourages ABE student writers (¹see “Acronyms & Terms” below) to explore their own ideas and suggestions for ways to make the world a better place for them, their families, and their communities.



Consider these questions as ways to get started.

- Who are the heroes in your life? What can you learn from them?
- Not all heroes wear capes. Do you need special powers to be a hero? How can everyday people be leaders?
- What would a “better world” look like to you? What would you do to make this happen?
- How can women leaders change the world?
 - What can women and men learn about leadership from women in history or from women in your own family or neighborhood?
 - What would you want to teach your sons and daughters—and their friends—about how to become leaders rather than bullies?
- What is “common good”? What does it mean to act for a common good?

“My personal experience with activism and activists who I admire is that we are ordinary citizens and that the leaders don't always have the power that we think they have.”
Kathryn Ssedoga, Student Leader and member of Women's Perspectives Committee.

¹ *Acronyms & Terms*

ABE Learners/Students include:

ABE	– Adult Basic Education
ESL	– English as a Second Language
ESOL	– English Speakers of Other Languages
GED	– General Education Development
ADP	– Adult Diploma

Upgrading (a Canadian term) –

In Canada, upgrading education/training has different meanings in various regions and contexts. Academic upgrading most often refers to literacy skills training delivered by college upgrading programs to strengthen pathways to apprenticeship and postsecondary. Literacy students may be referred to as adult literacy learners, adult literacy students, and adult literacy upgraders, depending on the preference of the person using the term and perhaps their pathway.

When WE LEARN refers to adult learners, ABE students, or literacy students, we mean:

Students participating in adult basic education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL or ESL), high school equivalency or GED family literacy, civic/citizenship education, workplace training, upgrading, and support systems (including developmental education) for transitions to college. Adult basic education/literacy efforts are sponsored through specialized learning centers, community colleges, social service agencies, community-based organizations, libraries, public school districts, reservations, churches, workplaces, prisons, shelters, and other settings.



Resources to explore activism

These articles are taken from *The Change Agent #19: Women & Literacy and the Supplement Issue*, which was prepared in 2004 by WE LEARN in collaboration with the New England Literacy Recourse Center. You can access the full issue & supplement from this link: <http://www.litwomen.org/tca/index.html> (Hard copies can be purchased in bulk from WE LEARN.)

Select one of these readings to use as a starting point to discuss how to get involved or take action:

Student writing

- “Fighting for My Rights,” *Stephanie Edma*
[http://www.litwomen.org/tca/tca19_p13Edma.pdf]
- “Love for People and for Education,” *An Interview with Klare Allen*
[http://www.litwomen.org/tca/tca19_p18Allen.pdf]
- “Women Who Paved the Way,” *Delores Martin*
[http://www.litwomen.org/tca/tca19_p25Martin%20&Bland.pdf]

Writings prepared by teachers

- “The Personal Is Political,” Adapted by Cynthia Peters
[<http://www.litwomen.org/tca/tca19Supp.pdf>]
- “Women in History: Activism and Education” – Timeline
[<http://www.litwomen.org/tca/timeline.html>]

Consider these statements and complete them with your ideas.

Activism means: _____

When I hear the word “activism,” I think about _____

The reason I want to be involved in my community is _____

The skills or tools or resources would I need to get involved in my community as an activist or as a leader are _____

Part 2

Pressing Issues: Places for Women to Take Action



What are the most pressing issues affecting women today and what would you do to address them?

Some examples...

- Body image
- Environment
- Sexuality
- Health & Well-Being
- Health Care Reform
- Financial literacy
- Access to literacy education or schools
- Education (especially access for women) - The right to equal opportunity learning
- Food safety
- Racism
- Sexism
- Poverty, class, economics
- Work and employment
- Others??

These are very big issues. Sometimes it's best to take small, manageable steps. Many small efforts by individuals can add to larger community solutions. Many people doing small things together can sometimes have more positive effect than one person doing one huge thing. For example, we can participate in recycling as one part of handling garbage.

- What is important to you today? Select one of these issues and describe what action you would take to provide leadership.
- How would you address these issues or bring about a desirable change?
- What would it mean to have your voice heard about these issues?

More questions to consider:

- What are you fighting FOR (rather than, what are you fighting against)?
- What does it mean to be an ally to another person, another cultural group, another community, or a movement responding to an issue that is not "your" issue?
- When have you sought out information from another person with a different point of view as part of expanding your understanding?

Part 3

What Inspires Us: Using the Voices of Others to Make Our Own Voices Heard

This section includes articles, quotes, songs, and videos of inspiring leaders.



Inspiring quotes by interesting leaders

- ☼ “Being a woman makes you a leader of yourself, families, and communities. Your voices need to be heard by everyone...especially to those people who are able to read and write, because many of them don’t know about or understand anything about people like ourselves who have difficulty with literacy skills.” – *Donna Jones*
Student Leader and Keynote Speaker at WE LEARN Conference 2009. You can read Donna’s full speech as inspiration for describing what you would do as a leader. Download from: <http://www.litwomen.org/conferences/2009/keynote.pdf>
- ☼ "Those who doubt the power of one individual to make a difference have never been alone in a tent with one mosquito!" – *shared by Kathryn Ssedoga (Women’s Perspectives Committee)*
- ☼ “Give light and people will find the way.” – *Ella Baker*
Who was Ella Baker? <http://www.ellabakercenter.org/page.php?pageid=19&contentid=9>
- ☼ “The only thing that is really worthwhile is change—and it’s coming.” – *Septima P. Clark, literacy activist*
Septima Clark created "citizenship schools" as part of the US civil right movement for adult education and voters' rights in 1950s American South. To learn more about her see: <http://www.safero.org/articles/septima.html>
- ☼ “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” – *Mahatma Gandhi*
Who was Gandhi? Use TinyURL: <http://tinyurl.com/qphceh> or http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/home/pages?page=http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/kingweb/about_king/encyclopedia/gandhi.htm

Inspiring Stories to Get Us Thinking – Read & Listen



“A Little Outrage Can Take You a Long Way”— <http://thisibelieve.org/essay/2/>
Cecilia Munoz - Washington, DC

As heard on NPR’s *Morning Edition*, September 26, 2005

For Cecilia Munoz, a childhood memory of anger has inspired a career in activism. She believes that early outrage fuels her work on behalf Hispanic immigrants for the National Council of La Raza.

“When Ordinary People Achieve Extraordinary Things”— <http://thisibelieve.org/essay/7/>

Jody Williams - Fredericksburg, VA

As heard on NPR’s *All Things Considered*, January 9, 2006

Jody Williams believes extraordinary things can happen when ordinary people decide to take action. Her own activism led to a 1997 international treaty banning landmines and to a Nobel Peace Prize.



Inspiring Song Lyrics to Get Us Thinking - Read & Listen Warrior

By the Wyrld Sisters

<http://www.myspace.com/thewyrds>



I was a shy and lonely girl
with the heavens in my eyes
and as I walked along the lane
I heard the echoes of her cries

I cannot fight
I cannot a warrior be
it's not my nature nor my teaching
it is the womanhood in me

I was a lost and angry youth
there were no tears in my eyes
I saw no justice in my world
only the echoes of her cries

I cannot fight
I cannot a warrior be
it's not my nature nor my teaching
it is the womanhood in me

I am an older woman now
and I will heed my own cries
and I will a fierce warrior be
'til not another woman dies

I can and will fight
I can and will a warrior be
it is my nature and my duty
it is the womanhood in me

I can and will fight
I can and will a warrior be
it is my nature and my duty
it is the sisterhood in me

Consider the following questions.

- What is possible when you are able to hear the voices of other everyday people as part of a public discussion?
- What does it mean to you to hear your own voice as part of an important public or private discussion?

Part 4

Next Steps – What Would YOU Do?



Step One:

Read “**General Tips for Student Writers**” by Donna Jones on the next page.

Step Two:

Consider the questions below as a way to begin your mind map* (see sample in Donna’s article).
OR

With your classmates or friends, name some important issues in your community. Make a poster board map of your community. Put an area that needs your attention the most in the center. Identify allies who could help you with activism. Identify potential obstacles and ways around them.

- ☼ If you were in a position of authority or a key decision-maker, what would you do to solve everyday problems?

- ☼ What would you do to remedy, transform, understand, unlearn what keeps you from understanding??

- ☼ If I were _____ [*Queen, Government Official, School Principle, Labor Union rep, Tribal Chief, Student Council President,etc....*], then I would _____.

- ☼ If I were _____ (*a mother, grandmother, wife, sister, partner, or single woman*) then I would _____.

- ☼ Who would be your allies or helping hands? What do you need from them? What connections do you need to make (like bridges over obstacles? Or tunnels through problems? Or paths around difficult areas?)

Step Three:

Keep writing and send your finished piece to WE LEARN by December 11, 2009. ☺

General Tips for Student Writers *By Donna Jones*

Donna Jones is a student leader who also loves to write. She has developed a workshop by students for students called "Writer to Writer." Donna was an Honors Award winner for *Women's Perspectives #1* for her essay "Better Self Esteem Can Create Better Health." She has participated on the Selection Committee since 2006. These are her suggestions for student writers who want to participate in *Women's Perspectives*.

There are 3 parts to writing.

A. Prewriting: (a stage for collecting everything together)

1. A good thing to think about before even getting started is to make a list of reasons for sending your writing to *Women's Perspectives*.
 - a. List the type of things that will stop you from sending in your entry. Sometimes when things get hard or people get upset with a project, they quit. I don't want to see this happen to you.
 - b. Now list what you will do if one of these problems does happen.
 - c. You can keep adding to these lists. Please don't let anything get in your way.
2. Pick the right time of day and place to do your writing.
3. Your brain is a muscle and it needs to get warmed up. This exercise will loosen it up: Just write whatever pops into your head. You can use a computer or paper. Remember your writing doesn't have to make sense or be correct. You can write, "I can't think of anything to write or I hate this exercise." Just keep the words flowing for 3 - 5 minutes.
4. Keep a notebook & pen handy during the day to write down ideas and thoughts. Also keep it by your bed at night. Or create a mind map* (see the example on the next page).
5. Get all the things together that you will need for this project before you start to write (paper, pens, erasers, dictionary, thesaurus). So you won't have an excuse to stop.

B. Writing: (a stage of organizing things and putting them down on paper)

1. Review your notes. Remember you don't have to use all of them.
2. Always have a good opening sentence or paragraph. Something that will get your readers to want to read more of your writing.
3. Write from your heart. BE HONEST! Write how you feel. If you feel like crying then make your readers want to cry. Get your readers to react to your story.
4. Your last paragraph is as important as your first paragraph. You want your readers walking away remembering what you wrote. Don't leave them guessing. Remember how a good ending makes the movie good and a bad ending can ruin it.

