INSTRUCTIONS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS
FOR
2020-2021

“DO THE WRITE THING” PHILADELPHIA
CHALLENGE

Thank you for involving your 6th, 7th, and 8th students in the 2021 Do the Write Thing program. All across America, students like yours are sharing their experiences and insights into youth violence. DtWT gives middle school students an opportunity to examine the impact of violence on their lives and to communicate in written form what they think should be done to change our nation’s culture of violence. Personal responsibility is emphasized. Through their writing and discussions, you will deepen your understanding of your students’ lived realities, helping you to facilitate empathetic communication and foster a positive and impactful learning environment. Your involvement and support are crucial to the success of DtWT in your school.

Please review the following materials concerning program rules, entry deadlines, selection criteria, classroom discussion, and student recognition before presenting the program to your students.

**Program Rules**

The following guidelines for the preparation of student writings have been distributed to all participating superintendents, principals and teachers:

♦ Students may use any form of written expression (e.g. essays, poems, plays or songs) as long as the language is positive and not derogatory. Students may submit only one entry per year. All entries must be the work product of only one student.

♦ Student entries, at minimum, should address three questions: How has violence affected my life? What are the causes of youth violence? What can I do about youth violence? Writings that do not address these questions will not be advanced in the selection process.

♦ Entries should be approximately 500 to 1000 words in length. Written forms of expression such as poetry that by its nature may be shorter, may contain fewer than 500 words.

♦ Entries must be typed or written legibly in black ink on 8 1/2” x 11” paper. Only one side of the paper may be used and the pages should be numbered.

♦ Entries must be in English.
♦ If a story is fictional, it must be identified as such to be advanced in the selection process, however, strong preference will be given to non-fiction in final selection process.

♦ If the student participant uses a quotation or another person's material in his or her entry, the entry must identify whose work is being used by citing the person's name or citing the source of the material. **Writings based upon plagiarism will not be advanced in the selection process.**

♦ Entries must have a "Cover Sheet" with the consent statement signed by the participating student and a parent or guardian. No personal information should appear on the body of the written entry. **Entries without a signed Cover Sheet will not be advanced in the selection process.** (See the attached Cover Sheet with the Student and Parent/Guardian Consent Statement.)

♦ Entries must be submitted in the form that they are received from the student writer. Editing for content, grammar or spelling by someone other than the student is not permitted. ¹

**Submission Deadlines**

All entries with a Cover Sheet attached must be submitted to the local coordinator of Do the Write Thing by April 30, 2021. Please complete your submissions through the [Online Submission Form](#).

**Selection Criteria**

Entries will be reviewed by your jurisdiction’s Do the Write Thing Committee, the coalition of business, community and governmental leaders that oversees and administers Do the Write Thing in your area. Entries will be selected on the basis of content, originality and responsiveness to the three questions: *How has violence affected my life? What are the causes of youth violence? What can I do about youth violence?* Grammar and spelling will not be used as criteria for selection.

In their writings, students should be encouraged to describe what they feel are the causes of youth violence and to offer specific suggestions about what they as individuals can do to reduce violence in their homes, schools and neighborhoods. Personal responsibility for responding to the problem of youth violence should be emphasized. Students should be encouraged to share personal experiences about the impact of violence on their lives and the lives of their peers. The panel of judges in your area will be looking at how well your students present their views on these matters.

¹ Teachers, please send us the writings and the Cover Sheets of all of the students who submit an entry. In this program, everybody who makes a good-faith effort to participate deserves to be recognized and have his or her work considered in the selection process.
Classroom Discussion

Classroom discussion is not mandatory for participation in DtWT. However, over the years we have found that students and their teachers gain much from the bonding that can result from the exchanges about the impact of youth violence that occur in pre-writing classroom discussions. Teachers have indicated that they are amazed at the openness and honesty of these classroom discussions. They also indicate that these discussions present excellent opportunities to identify and prevent youth problems before they reach crisis proportions.

Many of the teachers whose classes have participated in DtWT in the past have invited outside speakers knowledgeable about youth violence issues to lead pre-writing discussions. Other teachers have provided their students with selected readings or newspaper articles about violence in advance of the discussion to stimulate thought. Speakers or articles, which emphasize personal responsibility on the part of students for responding to the problem of violence, have proven to be particularly useful.

Below are some questions designed to generate discussion among your students before they prepare their entries for DtWT. For other ideas, please visit www.dtwt.org.

Questions to Consider:

- How does violence affect your daily lives?
- Where are you confronted by violence? Your home? Your school? Your neighborhood?
- What are some of the causes of youth violence in your community?
- What can you as an individual do to reduce youth violence in your community?

Student Recognition

Local Level:

Each jurisdiction participating in Do the Write Thing has established a DtWT Committee to coordinate the program. A “jurisdiction” may be a city, a county, a city-county combination or even an entire state. A complete listing of participating localities can be found on the National Campaign to Stop Violence website, www.dtwt.org. Most DtWT Committees will organize a recognition ceremony to honor the boy and girl from each participating middle school who are selected as School Ambassadors. In addition to the “School Ambassadors” from each school, you, along with the students’ parents and your principal, will be invited to attend the recognition ceremony. Most DtWT Committees will also publish the writings of all

2 Schools with fewer than twenty-five entries will be grouped together for review and School Ambassador selection purposes.

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their "School Ambassadors" and distribute the publication to area community, business and governmental leaders.³

**National Level:**

Each DtWT Committee will designate two student “National Ambassadors.” The two National Ambassadors along with each student’s teacher and one parent or guardian will be invited by the National Campaign to Stop Violence to attend the Do the Write Thing National Recognition Week activities in Washington, D.C. in July of 2021.⁴

Sadly we have learned during this pandemic of 2020 that there are circumstances beyond our control which may cause NCSV to adjust National Recognition Week in Washington, D.C. to a virtual Recognition Weekend in accordance with health and safety regulations.

The majority of the costs for the National Recognition Week activities will be paid for by our primary sponsors: the Kuwait-America Foundation and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science. The people of Kuwait have donated money to Do the Write Thing campaign for the past 25 years. This has been done to say thank you to the American people for the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. In addition, Southwest Airlines provides the airfare for our participants traveling to Washington, D.C.

During past National Recognition Weeks, National Ambassadors have met with a United States Supreme Court Judge, the United States Secretary of Education, the Attorney General of the United States, the United States Secretary of Interior, Members of Congress and many notable celebrities to discuss the problem of youth violence. A highlight of the National Recognition Week is placing a book of the writings of the 2020 student national ambassadors in the Library of Congress, ensuring that the students’ words will be available to all and for future generations. In addition, students have been honored at embassy receptions hosted by the State of Kuwait.

**Common Core Standards**

Do the Write Thing has been reviewed by a panel of highly qualified public school teachers for compliance with Common Core standards. DtWT meets all of the English Language Arts Standards in Writing for Grades 6, 7 and 8. (Standards W.7.1 through W.7.10 and W.8.1 through W.8.10) Please note that we have determined Standards W.7.2 and W.8.2 to only be applicable to nonfiction submissions. (Please see attached schedule for more details on DtWT fulfilling Common Core Standards)

³ While all DtWT Committees are encouraged to hold local recognition ceremonies and publish books of student writings, and while most local DtWT Committees do undertake these activities, the responsibility for organizing and funding these functions rests with each local Committee. Some start-up Committees do not initiate these functions during the early years of operation.

⁴ Jurisdictions must have at least 500 student writings to qualify for participation in the National Recognition Week activities in Washington, D.C.
Do the Write Thing and Common Core State Standards

Writing

Essays that include a narrative component, such as those that address the first question, can fulfill 3.A-E for grades 6, 7, and 8.

Essays that address the second two questions can fulfill 1.A-E, 2.A-F, 7, 8, and 9 for grades 6, 7, and 8.

All essays can be used to fulfill 4 for grades 6, 7, and 8.

Depending on the level of teacher involvement in students’ writing for DtWT, the program can be used to fulfill 5 (peer review), 6 (technology), and 10 (writing over a range of time and revision) for grades 6, 7, and 8.

Speaking and Listening

Classroom discussions, before and after presenting DtWT can be used to fulfill 1.B-D for grades 6, 7, and 8.

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Thank you for participating in Do the Write Thing. To have your entry considered for selection as a Student National Ambassador, you and a parent or guardian must complete this Cover Sheet and sign the Student and Parent/Guardian Consent Statement below.

Student’s First Name: __________________________ Student’s Last Name: __________________________

School: __________________________ School’s Phone Number: (_____ ) _______ - _________

Grade: _______ Parent’s Full Name: __________________________________________________________

Student’s Home Address: ________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Student’s/Parent’s Cell Phone Number: (_____ ) _______ - _________ Student’s Gender: ______

Teacher’s Full Name: __________________________ Teacher’s Cell Number: (_____ ) _______ - ______

Teacher’s Email Address: ________________________________________________________________

STUDENT AND PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT STATEMENT

The National Campaign to Stop Violence (NCSV), which sponsors Do the Write Thing, will publish selected students’ writings and quotations in a book and in a discussion paper on youth violence. Before publishing your writing, the NCSV requires your written consent and the written consent of a parent or guardian. If you and your parent or guardian agree to permit the NCSV to publish your writing, please sign the statement following: We agree to give ownership of the attached student writing to the National Campaign to Stop Violence so that it can be considered for recognition and published. The NCSV may further disclose the writing to the media and other parties as part of their national program.

Student’s Signature __________________________ Date __________

Parent’s Signature __________________________ Date __________

Student’s Email Address __________________________

Parent’s Email Address __________________________

FOLLOW US ONLINE:

/DtWTOfficial @DtWTOfficial @DtWTOfficial
Benefits of Do the Write Thing
documented by the
University of Texas at El Paso

FOR EDUCATORS
• Facilitates discussions that result in greater tolerance and compassion
• Establishes mutually trusted relationships with students
• Heightens awareness of healing and bonding between students and their families
• Increases knowledge about students leading to 1) attitudinal changes and 2) adapting their instruction

FOR STUDENTS
• Creates greater empathy and understanding for victims of violence
• Encourages more positive behaviors and attitudes toward peers and teachers
• Creates a belief that their positive actions can make a difference
• Increases tolerance and reduces judgment regarding differences among peers
• Increases communication with peers and family members, rather than resorting to violence

FOR PARENTS
• Initiates a better understanding of the impact of violence on their children
• Fosters an understanding of their child’s concerns
• Improves communication at home with children and spouse
• Creates a greater awareness of violence in the school and community

You can bring these benefits to your school or classroom by contacting Nickisha Cox, Esquire at nickisha.cox@courts.phila.gov or dtwtpilly@gmail.com. Join nearly 100,000 students who participate in DtWT each year.
Do the Write Thing Can Change Minds

The “Changing Minds” campaign is sponsored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. According to OJJDP, in 2015, 60% of all American youth were exposed to violence, crime or abuse. Based on scientific research from Harvard, the research reveals that a child’s positive and negative experiences literally shape and reshape the brain. The more a child witnesses violence, the more neural connections are created in the regions of the brain that involve fear, anxiety and impulsiveness…while fewer are created in regions that involve reasoning, planning and behavior control. This increased stress can lead to “long-term behavioral and physiological disorders” including depression, drug abuse, diabetes, stroke and inflammation patterns.

However, the young brain is malleable. Fostering stable, supportive relationships can prevent or help reverse this damage, resulting in lifelong benefits for the child’s learning, behavior and overall health.

Do the Write Thing is a proven program that can mitigate the negative impact of violence on a child when teachers, educators and volunteers open pathways using the “Five Gestures” suggested by OJJDP to help heal a child.

CELEBRATE
- Publicly recognize and praise children
- Encourage children to try new things and teach them about being kind and helpful to others
- Engage children in open ended thinking
- Encourage positive interactions between children and their peers and teachers

COMFORT
- Offer children safe ways to express their feelings and ideas
- Help children empathize and take others’ perspectives
- Expand children’s network of consistently caring adults

LISTEN
- Encourage children to express their feelings and thoughts
- Be open to their ideas and opinions
- Help children to express their experiences and make sense of them
- Allow them to share their story without interruptions
- Create processes that allow students a chance to share and be heard

COLLABORATE
- Encourage children to think ahead by discussing challenges they would face in carrying out their plans and help them consider how they can prevent or solve them
- Guide students to first identify and understand their obstacles, communicate how they are feeling and describe the problems in their own words
- Acknowledge children’s problem solving attempts whether or not the attempts are successful

INSPIRE
- Encourage children to spend time with other caring adults who can act as role models
- Help children develop strategies to bring them closer to short and long term goal success
- Support children’s abilities to speak up when things go wrong or when they are victimized
- Help them become advocates for change