



WRITING LIFE IN RESPONSE TO POLICE VIOLENCE

Note: Lessons are designed for 40-minute sessions and may be adapted to small group and/or workshops for middle school, high school, college and adult program settings.

For more information about WeWriteLife contact: info@renewtoday.net

Items	Key Notes
MATERIALS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Copies of WeWriteLife Know, Want to Know and Have Learned (KWL) Chart (see Pages 4-7)2. The New York Times video featuring Eric Garner's mother (May 2018 Opinion) - Eric Garner's Mother to Mayor: 'This Is Your Last Chance for Justice' Pens, paper and envelopes3. Sample WeWriteLife letter and letter template (see Pages 4-7)4. Pens, paper, envelopes & stamps
LEARNING OBJECTIVE & OVERVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will write letters to public officials to express interest and concern regarding recent national and local events.• This lesson is designed to engage students in letter-writing to local and/or national officials as tools of social activism and engagement.
ESSENTIAL QUESTION	<p><i>How can letter-writing be used to encourage social change?</i></p>
OPENING	<p>What do you think the following statement means, "The pen is mightier than the sword"? Explain.</p>
LINK	<p>Students share responses to Do Now. One of the most effective ways we can influence other people is in what we share with them – via text, calls and letters.</p>
ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT	<p>FOCUS: <i>What do you know about what has been happening between police officers and black men, women and children (e.g. Stephon Clarke in Sacramento, California; Saheed Vassel in Brooklyn, New York; Sandra Bland in Waller County, Texas) around the United States?</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Think & Write: Complete the K (know) section of your chart. Have pairs of students share what they know with one another before sharing as a class.2. Think & Write: Complete the W (want to know) section of your chart. Have pairs of students share what they want to know with one another before sharing as a class.3. Watch the New York Times video featuring Colin Kaepernick discuss his protest within the NFL (Opinion May 2018: 'Love is at the Root of our Resistance') <p>AND/ OR (Continued on next page)</p>

<p>Items</p> <p>ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT (Continued)</p>	<p>Key Notes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Watch a Common music video featuring Bilal Letter to the Free or Common's Black America Again short film discussing these issues) <p>AND/OR</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Read a Smithsonian Magazine article discussing the history of police brutality in America 6. Think & Write. Complete the L (what I have learned). After watching these videos/ films and/or reading this article what have you learned about the history of police brutality in America? What does Kaepernick mean when he says, "Love is at the root of our resistance"? How does Common's music video and/or film connect to these issues? Have students share what they have learned from these resources.
<p>MODIFICATIONS</p>	<p>Students can be provided with images and/or other texts related to these issues from around the country and asked to share what they know about the events portrayed in these images and/or texts. Students can be provided with either the video or text to discuss this issue rather than use both. Students may also have access to excerpts of the text with highlighted sections and/or the means to highlight the text while they read it. During the Independent Work students may have access to writing prompts.</p>
<p>JUSTACTS (Independent Work)</p>	<p>FOCUS: <i>How can our writing be a form of social activism responding to police violence?</i></p> <p>JustActs are WeWriteLife's call to action. Now is the time to demonstrate the power of words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the goal of WeWriteLife - to raise awareness of local officials of the importance of police violence among youth. • Discuss format of WeWriteLife letters - must be: a) brief, b) focus on a man, woman or child of color, c) be respectful in tone, and d) end with the words "I hope he or she lives." What is unsaid here is that the author would hope the subject of his/ her letter would live beyond an encounter with law enforcement. • See sample letter attached. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss. What message do you think "I hope he or she lives" is attempting to convey? 2. Have students identify a person they would like to write to (such as a local or national official, police chief, etc.) and who they would like to write about. 3. Invite students to write WeWriteLife letters. 4. Have students self-edit their letters using the Self and Peer Editing Checklist.
<p>HOMEWORK</p>	<p>Invite students to find another article related to the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color. At the next class discuss the article they found and what solutions may help improve the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color/youth.</p>
<p>RESOURCES</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. District of Columbia Public Schools - Preparing to Discuss Mike Brown in the Classroom Teacher Guide 2. PBS Newshour Feature on how to talk to kids about Ferguson 3. CNN feature on how to talk to youth about race and class

Items

Key Notes

STANDARDS

Common Core Standards Writing Standards:

Common Core English Language Arts Learning Standards: Write informative/ explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Teaching Tolerance Justice and Action Anchor Standards:

Justice

Students will recognize stereotypes and relate to people as individuals rather than representatives of groups.

Students will recognize unfairness on the individual level (e.g., biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g., discrimination).

Students will analyze the harmful impact of bias and injustice on the world, historically and today.

Students will recognize that power and privilege influence relationships on interpersonal, intergroup and institutional levels and consider how they have been affected by those dynamics.

Students will identify figures, groups, events and a variety of strategies and philosophies relevant to the history of social justice around the world.

Action

Students will express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when they themselves experience bias.

Students will recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice.

Students will speak up with courage and respect when they or someone else has been hurt or wronged by bias.

Students will make principled decisions about when and how to take a stand against bias and injustice in their everyday lives and will do so despite negative peer or group pressure.

NEXT STEP

Once students have written and edited letters, final copies should be mailed to the designated public official with information about the purpose of this letter writing effort (see sample letter to an elected official on page 7). You may choose to mail each individual letter and send a cover letter with each letter – this strategy may maximize the impact of the effort by flooding the elected official's mail box with the individual letters and desires of your students. Alternative you may choose to send a cover letter with the complete set of letters.

SAMPLE LETTER

Insert Elected Official Address

Dear Insert Elected Official,

My name is Ayesha James. I am 12 years old and a student at Girls Preparatory School in Brooklyn. My brother Jason is 19 years old. He is kind, caring, and loves playing video games.

I hope he lives. Please hold the police officer's involved in _____'s death accountable.

Sincerely,

Ayesha

NAME _____

CLASS _____

K-W-L Chart

Directions: Complete the chart below with your knowledge of police violence.

What I <u>K</u>now	<u>W</u>ant to Know	What I have <u>L</u>earned

SAMPLE COVER LETTER TO ELECTED OFFICIAL

Insert Elected Official's Address

Insert Date

Dear (Insert Elected Official's Name)

Our students wrote **WeWriteLife** letters to you to express their concerns related to police violence. A sample of these letters is enclosed. The WeWriteLife letter-writing campaign exists to raise awareness about the need to reform police practice and hold officers who perpetuate police violence accountable.

We hope that the members of our families and communities would **live** beyond encounters with law enforcement. We hope they live. We hope you hear us and work to pursue justice for us all.

Sincerely,

Insert name