



WRITING LIFE TO YOUTH POETS WHO ARE INCARCERATED

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 poems, the feedback sample poem and a feedback tip sheet from Free Minds Book Club (contact mail@freemindsbookclub.org to receive a:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) file of poems;b) feedback sample poem; andc) Free Minds Keeping it R.E.A.L. Feedback Tip Sheet2. Introductory Free Minds Book Club video featuring poetry reading of a poet who is incarcerated3. Colorful pens and scrap paper (if needed)4. Envelope and a stamp
LEARNING OBJECTIVE & OVERVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will write letters to youth who are incarcerated to encourage their ongoing efforts to build community through their poetry writing.• This lesson is designed to engage students in writing to youth who are incarcerated as tools of social engagement.
ESSENTIAL QUESTION	<p><i>How can letter-writing be used to encourage social change?</i></p>
OPENING	<p>What is one of your passions? Why are you passionate about this area of interest?</p>
LINK	<p>Students share responses to Do Now. Activists are any person who takes action to encourage social change. There are some people who are incarcerated who encourage social change while they are incarcerated.</p>
ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT	<p>Focus: <i>How can youth who are incarcerated use their words as tools of social engagement and activism?</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Read the following poem to the group: My passion by Immanuel (a Free Minds Youth Poet) The passion I have for writing is a feeling of peace and tranquility The desire to inspire myself ambitiously A sense of freedom without actually being free Unlocking my chains with this poetic key Exceeding beyond this feeling of imprisonment My mind directs these orchestrated sentences. Creatively creating these lines of inspiration Carefully planting my seed on this literary plantation

Items

Key Notes

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT (CONTINUED)

I open the eyes to many who listen
 A 19-year-old convict writing from prison
 Forever devoted to this paper and pen
 My passion...My love...My new best friend.

2. Discuss themes that emerge in the poem.

How do you relate to the poet's feeling that his passion provides a sense of freedom and peace? Where do you see yourself in the poem? Where does the poet address you directly as a reader of his poem?

3. Watch video introducing Free Minds Book Club video featuring poetry reading of a poet who is incarcerated

4. Invite students to take notes on what stands out to them and/or what they have questions about.

5. Discuss their role: What would you say to Immanuel as a way of encouraging him? Note some of these responses for the class to see - these will serve as a model for providing feedback on the poetry you read.

MODIFICATIONS

Students can be provided with either the video or the poem to discuss this issue rather than use both. Students may also have access to a written copy of the poem to follow along as it is read. During the Group Work section students may have access to writing prompts.

JUSTACTS (Group Work)

JustActs are WeWriteLife's call to action. Now is the time to demonstrate the power of words.

1. Organize students in groups of four to five students. Provide them with a sample feedback sheet and the Free Minds Keeping it R.E.A.L. Feedback Tip Sheet to identify the type of feedback that is acceptable for Free Minds.
2. Have students identify key themes they want to discuss in writing to youth who are incarcerated. (You may want students to read the poetry first and write their initial thoughts and responses on scrap paper before writing on the final copies of poetry that will be returned to the youth who are incarcerated).
3. Spend time writing back to the poetry from Free Minds Poets (use colorful pen) – the goal is to have multiple students write on one poet's work so that the poet's receive their poetry back full of colorful feedback. Have students respond to three to four poems.
4. Have students self-edit their letters using the Self and Peer Editing Checklist.

HOMEWORK

Have students find an article related to the relationship between social activism and incarceration. At the next session discuss how other groups have linked social activism and incarceration.

RESOURCES

[Article discussing social issues around which police officers and activists share common ground](#)

Items

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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.

Students will plan and carry out collective action against bias and injustice in the world and will evaluate what strategies are most effective.

NEXT STEP

Once students have written responses to the poets, final copies can be mailed to Free Minds Book Club at the following address:

Free Minds Book Club
 2201 P Street, NW
 Washington, DC 20037
 (202) 758-0829 | mail@freemindsbookclub.org