



Instructions for Classroom Teachers 2019



To: All Participating Middle School Teachers

**From: Judge Lori A Dumas, Chair, Do the Write
Thing Philadelphia**

**Ebony Wortham, Coordinator, Do the Write
Thing Philadelphia**

Subject: 2019 Do the Write Thing Challenge

Thank you for taking the time to involve your **6th, 7th, and 8th** grade students in the **2019 “Do the Write Thing” Challenge**. Starting this fall, you will be joined by thousands of other classroom teachers from across the United States in a coordinated, unique effort to give students the opportunity to communicate their thoughts on the impact of youth violence on their lives and to make personal commitments to reduce violence. This program can make a very positive difference in your relationship with your students and help reduce the level of violence in your school. According to a Chicago teacher, “The Do the Write Thing Challenge Program is responsible for one of the most important things that happened in a classroom during all the years I have been a teacher. After the children had the opportunity to write on the issue of violence, discussion in the classroom became open and extraordinarily emotional. The ultimate result was positive beyond a teacher's wildest expectations.”

In July of 2019, if your student is selected as a National Ambassador, you will be invited by the National Campaign to Stop Violence to attend the **“Do the Write Thing” Challenge** National Recognition Week in Washington, D.C. (travel and accommodations included). During previous National Recognition Weeks, “Do the Write Thing” National Ambassadors have met with a United States Supreme Court Justice, the United States Secretary of Education, the Attorney General of the United States, the United States Secretary of the Interior, Members of Congress and other prominent Americans to discuss the problem of youth violence. In addition, the students were honored at an embassy reception hosted by the Ambassador from the State of Kuwait to the United States and the

book of their writings was placed in the Library of Congress, ensuring that the student's words will be available to all. For more information about National Recognition Week please go to : www.dtwt.org

Enclosed is a packet titled "Instructions for Classroom Teachers", which explains this year's **"Do the Write Thing" Challenge** in more detail. This packet includes information about program rules, entry deadlines, selection criteria, classroom discussion, and student recognition. In addition you will find a brief summary of UTEP's research outlining the benefits of using the DtWT Challenge and information on how OJJDP's campaign on "Changing Minds" dovetails with the DtWT Challenge. All of this information can also be downloaded at our website www.dtwt.org. In addition, a video highlighting the National Recognition Week can be viewed. Note that student writings are to be submitted to the local coordinator for the National Campaign to Stop Violence by 5:00 pm by February 25th, 2019.

Thank you again for participating in this year's program. We wish your student's success and hope to see you and one of your students in Washington, D.C. next July.



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Thank you for involving your **6th, 7th, and 8th** grade students in the **2019 Do the Write Thing Challenge**. All across America, students like yours are rising to the challenge of doing something to end violence among young people. The **Challenge** gives middle school students an opportunity to examine the impact of violence on their lives and communicate in writing what they think should be done to change our culture of violence. *Personal responsibility is emphasized.* By encouraging students to make personal commitments to do something about the problem, the program ultimately seeks to give them the opportunity to break the cycles of violence in their homes, schools and neighborhoods. Your involvement and support are crucial to the success of the **Challenge** 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 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 judging process.
- Entries should be approximately 500 to 1000 words in length. Written forms of expression, such as poetry that, by their 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 an entry is fiction, it must be identified as so.
- 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.doc](#) 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.

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.

Submission Deadlines

All entries with a Cover Sheet attached must be collected by participating teachers and submitted to the local coordinator of DtWT by February 25th, 2019.

Selection Criteria

Entries will be reviewed by a panel of judges selected by your jurisdiction's Do the Write Thing Committee, the coalition of business, community and governmental leaders that oversees and administers the **Challenge** in your area. Entries will be judged 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 judging the entries.**

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.

Classroom Discussion

Classroom discussion is not mandatory for participation in the **Challenge**.

However, over the years we have found that students and their teachers gain much from the connections 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 report 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 the **Challenge** 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 the **Challenge**.

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?

Common Core State Standards

Do the Write Thing has been reviewed by a panel of highly qualified public school teachers. The Challenge has been aligned to meet all of the English Language Arts Standards in Writing for Grades 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. See attached for more information.

Student Recognition

Local Level:

Each jurisdiction participating in the **Challenge** has established a Do the Write Thing 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. Most Do the Write Thing Committees will organize a recognition ceremony to honor the boy and girl from each participating middle school who submit the best entries. The "School Ambassadors" from each school, the students' parents, teachers and principal will be invited to attend the recognition ceremony.¹ Most Do the Write Thing Committees will also publish the writings

¹ Schools with fewer than 25 entries will be grouped together for review and School Ambassador selection purposes.

of all their "School Ambassadors" and distribute the publication to area community, business and governmental leaders.²

National Level:

Each Do the Write Thing Committee will designate two "National Ambassadors" - the boy and girl from the jurisdiction who submit the most thought provoking entries for the **2019 Challenge**. 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 Challenge** National Recognition Week activities in Washington, DC in July of 2019.³

The majority of the costs for the National Recognition Week activities will be paid 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 the "Do the Write Thing" campaign for 20 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, **Challenge** 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 2019 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.

² While all Do the Write Thing Committees are encouraged to hold local recognition ceremonies and publish books of student ambassador writings, and while most local Do the Write Thing 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 their first year of operation.

³ Jurisdictions must have at least 500 student writings to qualify for participation in the National Recognition Week activities in Washington.



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From: Judge Lori A Dumas, Chair, Do the Write Thing Philadelphia

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Subject: 2019 Do the Write Thing Challenge

Do the Write Thing and Common Core State Standards

Writing is the core component of the Do the Write Thing Challenge (DtWT). After classroom discussions about youth violence, participating middle school students are asked by their teachers to make a commitment not to be involved in violence and provide written answers to three questions:

1. How has violence affected my life?
2. What are the causes of youth violence?
3. What can I do to reduce youth violence?

The DtWT experience is flexible, allowing for adaptation as needed by school districts and individual classrooms. Thus, the writing component of DtWT can cover significant portions of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts:

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 the DtWT challenge, 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.

6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
	Writing	
6.1 A-E	7.1 A-E	8.1 A-E
6.2 A-F	7.2 A-F	8.2 A-F
6.3 A-E	7.3 A-E	8.3 A-E
6.4	7.4	8.4
6.5	7.5	8.5
6.6	7.6	8.6
6.7	7.7	8.7
6.8	7.8	8.8
6.9	7.9	8.9
6.10	7.10	8.10
	Speaking and Listening	
6.1 B-D	7.1 B-D	8.1 B-D

*Benefits of the “Do the Write Thing” Challenge
as 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

The “Do the Write Thing” Challenge Program 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” Challenge 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

- Publically 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