

# INSTRUCTIONS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

FOR THE

2020-2021

Austin-Travis County

## “DO THE WRITE THING” CHALLENGE PROGRAM

Thank you for involving your 7th and 8th grade students in the **2020-2021 “Do the Write Thing” Challenge**. All across America, students like yours are rising to the challenge of doing something to end youth violence. The “**Challenge**” 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 reduce youth 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 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.<sup>1</sup>

### Submission Deadlines

**All entries with a Cover Sheet attached must be submitted to the Austin Travis County Local Coordinator by January 31, 2021.**

### 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 the "Challenge" 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 the “**Challenge**”. 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 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**”. For other ideas, please visit [www.dtw.org](http://www.dtw.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?

## Common Core Standards

The “Do the Write Thing” Challenge has been reviewed by a panel of highly qualified public school teachers for compliance with Common Core standards. The “Challenge” meets 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. (Please see attached schedule for more details on the “**Challenge**” fulfilling Common Core Standards)

## 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, [www.dtw.org](http://www.dtw.org). Most “Do the Write Thing” Committees will organize a recognition ceremony to honor the boy and girl from each participating middle school who are selected as School Ambassadors.<sup>2</sup> 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 “Do the Write Thing” Committees will also publish the writings of all their “School Ambassadors” and distribute the publication to area community, business and governmental leaders.<sup>3</sup>

### National Level:

Each “Do the Write Thing” Committee will designate two “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**” **Challenge** National Recognition Week activities in Washington, D.C. in July of 2021.<sup>4</sup>

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 the past 24 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 2021 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> While all “Do the Write Thing” Committees are encouraged to hold local recognition ceremonies and publish books of student 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 the early years of operation.

<sup>4</sup> 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 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 7 and 8.

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

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

## *Speaking and Listening*

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

	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade
<b>Writing</b>		
	7.1.A-E	8.1.A-E
	7.2.A-F	8.2.A-F
	7.3.A-E	8.3.A-E
	7.4	8.4
	7.5	8.5
	7.6	8.6
	7.7	8.7
	7.8	8.8
	7.9	8.9
	7.10	8.10
<b>Speaking &amp; Listening</b>		
	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

***Join the 100,000 students who participate in the DtWT Challenge each year.***

## 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

- 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