

2018 Ready Writing Prompts

Invitational A

Topic I

“The people will not revolt. They will not look up from their screens long enough to notice what’s happening.”
--George Orwell, English Novelist, 1984, 1903-1950

Topic II

“Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.” --Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd President of the United States, 1882-1945

Invitational B

Topic I

“Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.”
--Martin Luther King, Jr., American Civil Rights Activist, 1929-1968

Topic II

“But I don’t want comfort. I want poetry. I want danger. I want freedom. I want goodness. I want sin.”
--Aldous Huxley, English Novelist, Brave New World, 1894-1963

District

Topic I

“We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” --Elie Wiesel, American

Topic II

“The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly.”
--'Abdu'l-Baha', Persian Religious Leader and Champion of Social Justice, 1844-1921

Regional

Topic I

“I have a foreboding of an America in my children’s or grandchildren’s time – when the United States is a service and information economy; when nearly all the key manufacturing industries have slipped away to other countries; when awesome technological powers are in the hands of a very few, and no one representing the public interest can even grasp the issues; when the people have lost the ability to set their own agendas or knowledgeably question those in authority; when, clutching our crystals and nervously consulting our horoscopes, our critical faculties in decline, unable to distinguish between what feels good and what’s true, we slide, almost without noticing, back into superstition and darkness. The dumbing down of America is most evident in the slow decay of substantive content in the enormously influential media, the 30-second sound bites (now down to 10 seconds or less), lowest common denominator programming, credulous presentations on pseudoscience and superstition, but especially a kind of celebration of ignorance.”
--Carl Sagan (1934-1996), American Astronomer and Author, The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark, 1995

Topic II

“A healthy and ideal system of education would be where a teacher would patiently impart knowledge, instead of curriculum, upon the students, only after assessing their acceptability – where a student would acquire knowledge in order to learn, not to earn – where the parents would be willing to make necessary sacrifices in order to adorn their child with curiosity and thereafter nourish that curiosity, regardless of how absurdly impractical it becomes to the eyes of the society.”
--Abhijit Naskar (b. 1991), Indian Neuroscientist and Author, The Education Decree, 2017.

State

Topic I

The United States was founded on hate—the hatred that justified colonial annihilation of American Indians and that perpetuated the enslavement of Africans. Hate divided the country during the Civil War, and a century later, spawned protest movements, with activists vying over issues of justice and human rights. And Americans are not alone in this legacy. Obviously, our globe’s history of colonial conquest and brutality, and the many current hot spots of extreme violence and displacement, reflect deep currents of hate. It would be naïve to argue we’re in the most hateful moment in history. The hate that’s brewing now is harmful, frightening, and increasingly acute. It doesn’t have to be the worst moment in history for it to be bad enough to warrant a concerted effort at reckoning—and change. The bad news is we all hate. All

of us. That includes me—and I'm afraid it also includes you. We first have to face the hard truth. In different ways and to different degrees, consciously or unconsciously, all of us, in one way or another, sometimes treat other individuals and entire groups of human beings as though they are fundamentally less deserving than we are. We've gotten to the point where hate is such an acceptable norm that we not only believe it's inevitable but we try to overtly market its benefits—and exploit it for profit. There's now a dating app called Hater, which will match you with a potential love interest based on the things or people you mutually hate. Really. Meanwhile, much of the media relies on making animosity not only palpable but virtually addictive. More and more of us get our news primarily, if not exclusively, from television channels and websites that cater to our hate and present information

in ways that reinforce our biases. This not only exploits hate but exacerbates it. Across all media, ratings aren't going up because viewers are getting more informed but because they're getting more inflamed. I know I get more clicks and claps every time I roll my eyes on air, whether or not I mean to or not, and whether you think that's the meanest thing in the world or not. I'm not going to argue about which side or group does it worse. We all hate. And we all do it too much. So what do we do now? We think we're good people, but we don't see how that sphere of moral concern is constricted by hate, by the history and habits and culture of who matters and who doesn't in our society, which we have all bought into, whether we mean to or not. So we shake our heads about excessive corporate greed and we shake our fists against neo-Nazis marching in the streets, but not enough of us admit that they're reflections of the society we've all created, let alone acknowledge that they're reflections of ourselves. We have a crisis of hate in the United States and around the world, and we can't begin to address it if we don't first learn to see it—making the invisible visible—uncovering the inadvertent, implicit, deliberate, and the conscious forms of hate all around us and in ourselves. “Real change is systemic and self-implicating, urging us to see our role in vast, complex problems,” writer Anand Giridharadas said in a speech in 2017. Leo Tolstoy wrote, “Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.” We have to do both. Before it's too late.

--Sally Kohn (1977), American Political Commentator, *The Opposite of Hate: A Field Guide to Repairing Our Humanity*, 2018.

Topic II

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on the plot of ground which is given him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. Not for nothing one face, one character, one fact, makes much impression on him, and another none. It is not without pre-established harmony, this sculpture in the memory. The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray. Bravely let him speak the utmost syllable of his confession. We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted, but God will not have his work made manifest by cowards. It needs a divine man to exhibit anything divine. A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise shall give him no peace. It is a deliverance which does not deliver. In the attempt his genius deserts him; no muse befriends; no invention, no hope. Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say 'I think,' 'I am,' but quotes some saint or sage. He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose. These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God today. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence. Before a leaf-bud has burst, its whole life acts: in the full-blown flower there is no more; in the leafless root there is no less. Its nature is satisfied and it satisfies nature in all moments alike. There is no time to it. But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time. I hope in these days we have heard the last of conformity and consistency. Let the words be gazette and ridiculous henceforward. Instead of the gong for dinner, let us hear a whistle from the Spartan fife. Let us bow and apologize never more. A great man is coming to eat at my house. I do not wish to please him; I wish that he should wish to please me. I will stand here for humanity, and though I would make it kind, I would make it true. Let us affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times, and hurl in the face of custom and trade and office, the fact which is the upshot of all history, that there is a great responsible Thinker and Actor moving wherever moves a man; that a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the center of things. Where he is, there is nature. He measures you and all men and all events. You are constrained to accept his standard. Ordinarily, every body in society reminds us of somewhat else, or of some other person. Character, reality, reminds you of nothing else; it takes place of the whole creation. The man must be so much that he must make all circumstances indifferent — put all means into the shade. This all great men are and do. Every true man is a cause, a country, and an age; requires infinite spaces and numbers and time fully to accomplish his thought; — and posterity seem to follow his steps as a procession.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), American Essayist and Philosopher, *Self-Reliance*, 1841.