

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS
FOR
2023-2024
DO THE WRITE THING

Thank you for involving your 6th, 7th and 8th grade students in the **2024 Do the Write Thing** program. All across America, students like yours are sharing their experiences and insights into youth violence. **DtWT** 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 change our nation's culture of violence. Personal responsibility is emphasized. Through their writing and discussions, you will deepen your understanding of your students' lived realities, helping you to facilitate empathetic communication and foster a positive and impactful learning environment. Your involvement and support are crucial to the success of **DtWT** 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.¹
- ◆ **It is recommended that teachers remind students about mandated reporting requirements in their initial explanation of the assignment.**
- ◆ **If submitting by mail, do NOT staple essays. Please attach cover sheet and essay with paperclip**

Submission Deadline and Instructions

All entries with a Cover Sheet attached must be submitted to the local coordinator of Do the Write Thing or postmarked by March 8, 2024. Student writings may be sent via email to rachel.gemar@mt.gov or mailed to the address below:

Montana Board of Crime Control
Do the Write Thing
5 S. Last Chance Gulch
Helena, MT 59620-1408
Attn: Natalia Bowser, DTWT Chair

When you submit students' essays, please also email Montana's DtWT Coordinator, Rachel Gemar (rachel.gemar@mt.gov) with the following:

- total number of essays being submitted
- total number of students participating in the program (including students whose writings were not submitted to MBCC)
- contact information for a designated mandated reporter (if none is provided, MBCC will assume the teacher is the preferred mandated reporter)

Selection Criteria

¹ 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.

Entries will be reviewed by MBCC board members, staff, and other volunteers. 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 will be looking at how well your students present their views on these matters.

Classroom Discussion

Classroom discussion is not mandatory for participation in **DtWT**. However, over the years we have found that students and their teachers gain much from the bonding that can result from the pre-writing classroom discussions about youth violence. 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 **DtWT** 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 **DtWT**. For other ideas, please visit 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?

Student Recognition

Local Level:

Each jurisdiction participating in **Do the Write Thing** has established a **DtWT** 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. Montana's DtWT Committee organizes an annual recognition ceremony in May to honor the top ten finalists. Teachers, principals, and family members are invited to attend. The Montana Board of Crime Control (MBCC) recognizes finalists and Student National Ambassadors on its website, in a quarterly newsletter, and in a biennial report to the Governor. Occasionally, some newspapers will also publish a story on local finalists.

National Level:

Each **DtWT** Committee will designate two student "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** National Recognition Week activities in Washington, D.C. in July of 2024.⁴ Typically, more than one parent/guardian will participate in the DtWT National Recognition Week. However, due to budget limitations the program may only have funds to pay for one parent or guardian's travel, and only one parent is permitted to attend each individual event. Many families choose to split the events between two parents/guardians.

Sadly, we have learned during this pandemic that there are circumstances beyond our control which may cause NCSV to adjust National Recognition Week in Washington, D.C. to a virtual Recognition Weekend in accordance with health and safety regulations.

The majority of the costs for the National Recognition Week activities will be paid for by our primary sponsor: the **Kuwait-America Foundation**. The people of Kuwait have donated money to **Do the Write Thing** campaign for the past 29 years. This has been done to say thank you to the American people for the liberation of Kuwait in 1991.

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 2022-2023 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.

Common Core Standards

Do the Write Thing has been reviewed by a panel of highly qualified public school teachers for compliance with Common Core standards. **DtWT** meets all of the English Language Arts Standards in Writing for Grades 6, 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 **DtWT** fulfilling Common Core Standards)

⁴ 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 Do the Write Thing. 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 DtWT, 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.

6 th Grade	7 th Grade	8 th 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 & Listening		
6.1.B-D	7.1.B-D	8.1.B-D

Please Type (Preferred) or Print Legibly in Black/Blue Ink

Teacher's Email Address: _____

Student's Email Address	Parent's Email Address
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@DtWTOfficial

***Benefits of Do the Write Thing
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

***You can bring these benefits to your school or classroom by contacting
Lisa Cone at info@dtwt.org or 1-800-256-0235.
Join nearly 100,000 students who participate in DtWT each year.***

Do the Write Thing 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 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