

# Public Education—Writing Prompts

1. Share a time you had to fight for something related to your own or your child's public education. What was it like? What did you have to learn to be able to engage in the fight? Did you fight alone or with others? What was the outcome? Did you win your goal? If not, did you "win" anything in the process of the fight? If so, what?
2. Read this excerpt and respond to one or more of the questions below it:

"In education, charter schools [represent] privatization -- public assets turned over to private operators. What's the problem with this? Private companies are designed to meet the needs of their owners and investors. But public services, like public schools, are designed to serve a common good, not a private one. Privatization, in the case of charters, means that public dollars intended to meet student instructional needs are diverted to make profits for private investors, often with little oversight" (pp. 31-32).

- a) What do you think about the idea of privatizing education and schools?
- b) What is the role of charter schools and other private education in your community? How have you been involved in the struggle around public vs. private education?



*Asean Johnson*

3. Asean Johnson, a nine-year-old in Chicago, spoke to a large crowd that was protesting the closing of his school. He said, "You should be investing in these schools, not closing them. You should be supporting these schools, not closing them..." (pp. 27-28). What is your experience with school closings? Have you been involved in organizing to try to keep schools open? What happened? How did being involved in that struggle affect you, your family, and your community? To watch Asean Johnson's speech, search for him on youtube.com.
4. High-stakes testing has become the model of education reform. Leaders in education once praised high-stakes testing, and some have since "renounced" its practice saying, it is "measuring and punishing." (pp. 31) How has this practice played out in your own educational experience or school? Are teachers expected to measure their students' success using testing alone? How would you measure success in your own education?

**DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 4, 2016.** A \$50 stipend will be paid to each adult education student whose work is accepted for publication.

**PLEASE SEND MATERIAL TO:** Cynthia Peters at [cpeters@worlded.org](mailto:cpeters@worlded.org). Questions? Visit our website [changeagent.nelrc.org](http://changeagent.nelrc.org) or call 617-482-9485.

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# LGBTQ Rights—Writing Prompts

1. Regarding Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) issues, what changes have you noticed in your family or community? Share a story from your life about how someone (or some group of people) fought for their rights around gender and/or sexuality. What did they win in the process of fighting?
2. Artist and activist Julio Salgado says, “The way I speak up is through art.” He explains that art helps us tell the stories of people whose stories are sometimes invisible or never heard (p. 22). In his comic “Liberty for All” ([dreamersadrift.com/julio-i-exist/liberty-for-all-16](http://dreamersadrift.com/julio-i-exist/liberty-for-all-16)), Julio tells the story of a young person who is queer and undocumented. In the picture above Julio’s character “Liberty” is wearing a t-shirt that says, “Sometimes I scream to remind myself that I still exist!” Julio reminds us that “speaking out on anything can be a little hard to do.”
  - a) Why would Liberty need to scream to remember that she exists?
  - b) Describe why artwork is important to social and cultural change.
  - c) What are ways you have used art to tell your story? Create a piece of art that tells part of your story.
  - d) What cultural norms does Julio challenge with his artwork?



3. Read this excerpt on LGBTQ Marriage Equality and respond to one or more of the questions below it.

“AIDS broke the silence about gay people’s lives and really prompted non-gay people to think about gay people in a different way. It prompted gay people to embrace this language of inclusion, most preeminently marriage. That, in turn, accelerated our inclusion in society and the change in attitudes” (p.9).

  - a) What “change in attitudes” do you believe have taken place in your lifetime regarding LGBTQ people?
  - b) What difficult silences have you broken to reach justice or equality for yourself or others?
  - c) How have you challenged gender or sexuality cultural norms in your life?

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# Low-Wage Work—Writing Prompts

1. Share a time you have stood up for higher pay, better conditions, and/or dignity on the job. How did you do it? What did you gain in the process?
2. Read the excerpt in the box on the right and respond to the questions below:
  - a) Reflect on the fact that restaurant jobs are growing faster than other jobs, but the pay for workers is lower than most other workers. What is your experience with restaurant jobs?
  - b) What do you think of the ROC's decision to target and disrupt Darden Restaurants? What effect do you think the protests have had on the restaurant chain's public image and profits? What effect did it have on its workers and consumers? Does it make sense for workers to organize in this way? Why or why not?
3. Image below: During the "March for Rights, Respect, and Fair Food" (p. 118), workers hold signs that demand "Respect" and "Dignity." Why would workers make these demands? What does this mean: "Publix profits equals farmworker poverty." What is the cultural norm these workers are pushing back against with their artwork and messages? How does taking artwork into the streets (rather than into a museum) impact our society?

## Low-Wage Restaurant Work

"Saru Jayaraman is co-founder and co-director of Restaurant Opportunities Centers United ([rocunited.org](http://rocunited.org)). ... Jayaraman explains the challenging landscape confronting ROC: 'The restaurant industry right now is the second-largest private sector employer in the U.S. It's over ten million workers. One in 112 Americans work in the restaurant industry. It's absolutely the fastest-growing sector of the U.S. economy.' While many restaurant chains are reporting record sales, this good fortune has not been shared with the workers. The restaurant industry is 'the absolute lowest-paying employer in the U.S.,' says Jayaraman. And restaurant workers typically lack benefits such as paid sick days and adequate health insurance. ROC is pushing back on multiple fronts. ... In 2008, ROC helped win \$4 million from Fireman Hospitality Group, a large New York City restaurant owner, to settle claims of stolen tips and wages, sexual harassment, and discrimination. In 2012, Darden Restaurants, the world's largest casual dining company (it owns Red Lobster, Olive Garden, LongHorn Steakhouse, and other national chain restaurants), announced that it would limit workers' hours in order to avoid paying for their health care under President Obama's Affordable Care Act. Two months later, the company canceled the plan after ROC and others protested and profits plunged 37% in response to bad publicity generated by the protests" (pp. 121-122).



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# Housing—Writing Prompts

1. What sorts of challenges around housing do you face? Have rents been going up in your neighborhood? Have you had to struggle with your landlord to improve conditions? Have you had to advocate for yourself or others to get access to a shelter or a housing voucher? Describe what you did and whether you linked with others experiencing a similar struggle?
2. At City Life/Vida Urbana, a housing organization in Boston, new people come to the public meetings because they are facing foreclosure, eviction, or bad conditions. They often arrive feeling ashamed—like they have done something to deserve the situation. When they arrive, City Life staff and volunteers tell them, “Welcome. You are in the right place. You can leave your shame at the door.” Then they are invited to tell their story in front of the room. After they learn how they can fight back, City Life organizers ask them, “Are you willing to fight to stay in your home?” And when they shout, “Yes,” the rest of the participants in the packed room respond, “Then we’ll fight with you.” What shift do you think happens for people when they come to a meeting and have that experience? Describe a time you have shifted from a sense of private shame about something in your life to a stance of righteous anger and the possibility of fighting back.



*A City Life/Vida Urbana protest.*

3. Do you believe housing is a right? How does your community support people and families without housing? Describe how affordable housing could improve our communities.
4. Look at the messages on the signs in the photo above. They say (from left to right): “Housing for people, not for profit,” “Stand Up; Fight Back,” and “Don't Evict, Negotiate!” Do you agree or disagree with those messages? Why or why not?

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