



## *Making Writing Essential to Teen Lives*

### THE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

It's not surprising that adolescents respond well to writing assignments that invite them to speak from their own experience, to share what's in their heart. For years, WKCD has provided a stage for teen writers and thinkers to make their voices heard on topics ranging from family and identity to school reform and inequality.

Today's heightened call for narrative, nonfiction writing by middle and high school students reinforces this social-emotional connection: when teenagers are given the chance to write freely on issues that matter to them, their words can shine.

Here, we offer a half dozen writing prompts that have worked for WKCD in our efforts to engage adolescent learners as journalists, essayists, and documenters.

**NOTE:** *If your students want to send us what they write, we're happy to consider it for publication on [www.whatkidscando.org](http://www.whatkidscando.org). While keeping an eye on what constitutes strong nonfiction writing—whether defined by today's Common Core or the famous essayist E.B. White—it is fresh ideas and essays written in a strong voice that draw us most. As always, we also seek to reflect and honor the diversity of learners that invigorate our nation's schools. Please send submissions to [info@wkcd.org](mailto:info@wkcd.org) with the essay attached as a word.doc. Be sure to write at the top of the essay the student's name, age, school attended, and email address. Essays should not exceed 1,500 words (or be less than 250 words).*

### SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WRITING PROMPTS

1) Think about an opinion you feel very passionate about—and a time when it was challenged by someone. Did you decide to keep your opinion strong—or were you convinced enough to change your mind? Tell the story of this experience so we can see it, hear it, feel it, and have to decide with you.

2) "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves," the poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote. Write a list of the questions in your life, and then choose the most important one, or the most unsolved one—the one that requires the most patience of you. Tell us about why it is important to you.

3) What music is the soundtrack to your life? What do you put on the speakers at all hours, keep as the background jam, and share with your friends? Tell us about one musical artist or one song that you love, and why they've got your groove.

4) Difficulty is a part of life. But hopefully, every young person has someone older they can turn to for advice, support, listening or just a good simple hug when things turn rough. Tell us about a person who provides that for you, and how they do it. If no one does, please accept our sympathies—and tell us what that's like for you.

5) Have you ever invented or re-invented yourself? How do you express your imagination? Tell about a time when you decided to make a change in how to show yourself to the world, and why.

6) Have you ever had the opportunity to show kindness to a stranger? Or to help make something a little better in a city, neighborhood, or human heart? Tell us what you did to help, and what effect it had on you.