

Pre-writing Activities

Women's Perspectives Issue #6



The topic for this issue emerged from a conversation with the *Women's Perspectives* Committee. We were talking about ways to make the publication self-sustaining and asking ourselves, "How can we develop *Women's Perspectives* in order to raise enough money through sales, donations, business partners, and sponsors to continue the publication in years to come?"

The adult learners on the committee stepped up in a big way. They know and acknowledge *Women's Perspectives* as vital to them and their peers. It gives them a public forum for their writings and supports their education. As we discussed the financial future and on-going possibilities for *Women's Perspectives*, students recognized they need/want a bigger audience. The adult learners on the committee want *Women's Perspectives* to be read BEYOND the audience of literacy students, teachers, and programs. WE LEARN, a community committed to women's literacy as a societal issue, wants *Women's Perspectives* to be available to a much broader reading audience.

They want learner-writers to impress and inspire ALL readers with their possibilities and vitality. Issue #6 will focus on the ways adult learners ARE already contributing to society and how much more potential they have. Improving their education is one piece of asserting their position of "I'm just like you" and "I am valuable" and "We have a whole lot to offer for families and communities."

From these conversations, our theme became clear- **We Are Here: How I Add Value to Society.**

What do we mean by this?

Please use the interview with Shellie Walters on the page and the Pre-Writing Activities attached to discover some suggestions and prompts.



Empowering Women Through Literacy

Shellie Walters, a student leader, member of the WE LEARN Board of Directors, and vocal committee/supporter of this issue, outlined her ideas in a conversation as recorded by Mev Miller (WE LEARN Director).

As students, we often put ourselves down. We don't think we can do anything. We put ourselves down just because we can't read or write well or can't do math, and maybe we don't have a very good education or had bad experiences in school. We didn't think we could be good or useful until we had a good education.

But what were we doing with what we DID have before we came into a literacy program?

For example, my verbal skills were very good, but I didn't have written skills. I could hide my poor writing skills because I have great verbal skills. I could cover other things because of that, too.

Women who have poor reading and writing still have lots of other skills, though they might not recognize them as important.

Many women were successful in work or their family or their community, but they were not recognized as successful because of a lack they had in another area.

So, when we come back to school, we're seen as lacking. We celebrate our school successes AFTER we come back, but we forget that we were also productive before!

We have always found ways to make things work in our lives. We have skills in everyday survival beyond what reading can teach us, but we forget we have these coping/surviving skills.

For example, many women have a good work ethic. They are good workers and are able to keep a job. When women come back to school, the teachers or tutors get focused on how much education they don't have rather than how they are or what they can already do.

There are different standards. We don't need the degrees to be successful in many areas, but

education helps us to be more successful. Every step up the rung should be celebrated.

In this issue, we would like to hear students' voices of strength and contribution. As students, we need to have a look at what we DO have rather than what we don't have. We DO have an important point of view. We ARE already making contributions to society, and they will become stronger with more education.

Here are some questions to think about so you can write for the next *Women's Perspectives*, "**We Are Here: How I Add Value to Society.**"

1. Before joining a literacy program what were you doing? How were you already successful?
2. What compensations worked for you? What made you feel proud? **How ARE you successful? What did you do before that contributed to society? What besides** education are you successful at?
3. What are your best qualities? How are they helping you continue your education? How might they help you in the future? What skills did you build on because of your lack of education? What strengths did you increase? What are the ways you are smart besides being school smart?
4. How do you remember things? What are your memories like? (e.g., explain how you use your memory when you can't write it down)
5. What skills did you develop because of your lack of reading or writing or math skills?
6. What helped you through the challenges?
7. What skills did you rely on to help you through the challenges & how have those skills changed with more education? What are the new ways you have discovered you are using your previous skills to complement the new skills you are building?

A Dream Deferred

The following poem by Langston Hughes describes what happens to dreams that are left on the side and forgotten. But what about the dreams that we've made come true?

A Dream Deferred By Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

1. To defer is to _____
2. Two synonyms for *defer* are _____
3. The opposite of *defer* is _____
4. Two antonyms for *defer* are _____
5. To *defer* a dream is to _____
6. What does it take to realize (achieve) a dream?

7. Imagine you are writing a poem called "A Dream Realized." Write the first line to this poem.

A Dream Realized

Now keep writing and finish your poem!

Inspirational Quotes

Quotes and sayings can be meaningful and inspirational to us at different times in our lives. Here are some quotes we found that relate to our theme “We Are Here!” Choose one of the quotes and write your thoughts about it. Or, choose a quote or saying that you have personally used as an inspiration or encouragement.

“As for accomplishments, I just did what I had to do as things came along.”

-- Eleanor Roosevelt, 1954

“People don’t understand the kind of fight it takes to record what you want to record the way you want to record it.”

-- Billie Holiday, 1956

“I want to state upfront, unequivocally and without doubt: I do not believe that any racial, ethnic or gender group has an advantage in sound judging. I do believe that every person has an equal opportunity to be a good and wise judge, regardless of their background or life experiences.”

-- Sonia Sotomayor

“Empowerment happens when a person who is seen as the problem begins to see him or herself as part of the solution.”

-- Saul Alinsky

Faces of WE LEARN

Adult learners have great potential. Improving our education is one piece of asserting the position of “I’m just like you” and “I am valuable” and “We have a whole lot to offer for families and communities.”

The images on the first page of the pre-writing activities are of adult learners. They have something to say about themselves. We also have pictures of other learners on our website [<http://www.litwomen.org/perspectives/2011>]

- How do they inspire you?
- What would you say about yourself?

Think about a conversation you have had with another learner that inspired you and write about it. OR take a picture of yourself and write about what you would say about yourself and why.

Acrostic Poem

Write an acrostic poem using the words WE ARE HERE:

W _____

E _____

A _____

R _____

E _____

H _____

E _____

R _____

E _____

Litany for Survival

The following text is from a poem by Audre Lorde called Litany for Survival. (For the complete poem, go to <http://www.interactivetheatre.org/resc/litany.html>)

and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive

Sometimes it seems that all odds are against adult learners. It might seem like you are not meant to survive. Speak with your strong voice about what you have to offer in the world by responding to the following questions.

1. In your life (or in your actions) how are you proving that you ARE worth something?
2. How ARE you proving that you do mean to survive?
3. How ARE you doing more than just surviving?
4. What IS the value you have to add to society?
5. What do you want others to know about how you are “just like them?”
6. What are all the positive things you know about that learners are contributing to their families, or schools, or communities?

More resources connected to A Litany for Survival:

Recording of a young woman reading Litany for Survival

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJt4XS_GPu4&feature=related

Movie trailer with Audre Lorde talking about her life and work and reading from *Litany for Survival*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diHzbQNyO2k&feature=related>

Music

Listen to the song, You Gotta Be by Des'Ree

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKW3zREFAoo>

- How many of these adjectives would you say describe you? Why?
- Tell a story about yourself that portrays this adjective.

A student member (Kathryn Ssedoga) of WE LEARN and *Women's Perspectives* Committee participant, used to sing with a woman's chorus in Canada. She suggested these three songs as possible writing prompts:

- When They Know Who We Are
(It is a song about human rights. Think about it relates to literacy learners.)
- Walk, Sister, Walk
- Sister, You Keep Me Fighting

You may listen to them at the WE LEARN website page for *Women's Perspectives*:

[<http://www.litwomen.org/perspectives/2011>]

Additional suggestions for teachers

Some more prompts to get students writing:

- What did you do today? What skills did you need to get that done?
- I am an expert at _____
- In your life (or in your actions) how are you proving that you are worth something?

Sometimes we don't recognize our own best qualities. Usually it's easier for us to recognize another person's talents. So ask a classmate for help!

- ✓ Group your students by pairs.
- ✓ Have each student list positive qualities or observations about his/her partner.
- ✓ Then have the students share/talk about their lists.
- ✓ Here are some possible writing prompts:
 - _____'s (student's name) best qualities are...
 - What positive qualities do you appreciate most about _____ (student's name)?
 - What talents does _____ (student's name) have?

Create a "Care and Share Wall" in your classroom to highlight positive actions and good deeds your students do for themselves or the program. This can be used for a "jumping off" point for writing.

** Another WE LEARN Resource: **Teaching & Learning with *Women's Perspectives*: A Resource Kit**. For more information visit: <http://www.litwomen.org/perspectives/kit.html>