



Introduction

Below are the previous essay writing prompts used in StageofLife.com's monthly, national student writing contest. These prompts are a quick tools to...

- Jump-start class discussion
- Build stronger essay writers
- Kick-off a new unit or novel that may tackle a theme addressed a writing prompt
- Provide in-class writing exercises

Each of these writing prompts also includes a mentor text, a summary page about the writing contest from which the writing prompt was used, and in some cases, an additional lesson plan (see StageofLife.com for these back-up materials).

To Do

Ask your students to answer these below writing prompts in 500 words or less. We've categorized them by seasonality to flow through the standard 10-month school year, but we leave to you how best you'd like to implement the writing prompts in your classroom.

Writing Prompts

August: Write a letter to yourself with the intention that you'll be reading this again at the end of the school year. Think about your goals, where your head is now, and where you hope to be in 10 months.



Students - we want you to write a letter to yourself. Yes, you heard us...a letter to yourself. Take 15 minutes, alone, and spend some time thinking about the upcoming school year. Think about the things you want to accomplish. The things you fear. Think about where you've been and where you're going. Think about how your summer has been going. What are you looking forward to? What are you dreading about the return to school? Think about your goals. Think about if you're looking to make a big change this year...or simply survive?

After all of that thinking, now write a "Letter to Me." This is a letter addressed to yourself. Tackle some of the topics we've outlined above...or get creative and come up with your own original angle for the letter.

September: Have you ever been bullied, teased or picked on? If so, about what?



Whatever you want to call it, bullying is a problem in many schools and continues to be a hot topic in the national press. 91% of teens, according to Stage of Life's bullying survey of over 1000 high school students, have been bullied.

What's your story?



October: What stresses you out, and how do you cope with that stress?



From classes to homework to jobs to extra curricular activities to social outings, teens and college students are maintaining hectic schedules. Add on top of that any current relationship hardships, social issues, e.g. bullying, illnesses or other personal problems and it's not surprising that many young people feel...stressed.

November: What are you most thankful for?



We all get busy during the day-to-day routine of our lives, but it's important to stop once in while and reflect on what matters most, and to give thanks for that. Keeping that in mind, who or what, in your life right now, should receive acknowledgment of your thanks.

December: What is your relationship with money? How do you spend/save and why?



Money....Cash. Coin. Greenbacks. Pesos. Gravy. Deniro. KaChing. Moola. So we're curious...how do teens and college students feel about money? Whether you know a homeless person or have a friend living in the penthouse, what is your relationship with the almighty dollar?

January: Who is your hero?



Ask your students to think about heroes in their lives, community or the national media. It could be a family member, someone famous, or an everyday person who is quietly making a difference. You'll probably be surprised by some of the responses.

February: What suggestion(s) do you have to make a positive change at your school or with the educational system as a whole?



How would teens improve education? We wanted to know how students were perceiving their educations, educational environments at their high schools, colleges and universities and the overall trends in education. Ask your students to share their ideas on how they would improve the educational environment.



March: What form of media impacts your life the most, and why?



The "media" is an undeniably powerful entity in our daily lives, and even more invasive for teens and college students, a generation growing up with more forms of media choices than any other generation before them.

April: Is prom a negative or positive high school tradition?



Going to prom is a high school milestone, and prom traditions have been around for decades. Dresses. Dinner. DJ's. Dancing. For most teenagers, it's about celebrating life with friends and/or a significant other. However, we've all heard the "negative" aspects often associated with prom too. Drinking. Drugs. DUI's. Damaged self-esteem. Date rape. So we want to know - is prom a positive or negative milestone.

May: What is one thing you don't know about your Mother or Father?



How well do teens really know their parents? This prompt asks teens and college students to interview their parents and ask them to share ONE thing about themselves their son/daughter doesn't already know.

After the parent interview and essay are completed, ask your student if they learned something that shaped the way they think about their parents. We call this writing prompt the "Parent Paradigm Shift."

June: What was the most difficult thing you overcame this (or last) school year?



From friends to family to graduation to grades to self esteem, teens go through a lot in a school year. Ask your students to write about one area or experience that caused them the most trouble, but that they were eventually able to overcome.

July: What organization, company, non-profit or 'cause' will help make the world a better place?



How do teens want to better the world? Our mission on StageofLife.com is to help change the world, one story at a time. What a better way to do that than to ask teens and college students about worthwhile causes we should all know about. This was an opportunity for teens to shed light and share with us their favorite non-profit, company, organization or 'cause' that could help make the world a better place.



Supplemental Writing Prompts

Prompt: What is the value of marriage?



This contest came out in February, the month of love. Valentine's Day sits right in the middle of this month and helps (or in some cases forces) all of us to pay homage to the idea of romance...love. We decided to get a little controversial this and asked teens to share their point of view on marriage.

Prompt: Do we have an obligation to take better care of ourselves by making changes in the way we eat and/or buy and consume food?



How do teens feel about food, obesity and nutrition? TV shows like NBC's *Biggest Loser* are big hits and books like Michael Pollan's Food Rules are flying off the shelves. Even film documentaries like *Food, Inc.* and *Super Size Me* have pushed into the mainstream consciousness. It goes without saying a tipping point is occurring in our society's awareness in regards to people's relationship with food. Obesity in America is reaching an epidemic...but are people ready or really willing to change? Is our addiction to unhealthy food too hard to break?

Prompt: What is the most difficult thing about planning for or attending college?



We want to know what's making the college process or college itself difficult and why. Financial aid? Application process? Juggling classes and work? What is making college difficult? This writing prompt was originally held in partnership with "Take America to College" initiative.

Prompt: What is one behavior you can either change or incorporate into your daily life that will reduce our negative impact on the environment?



The negative environmental impact and tragedy of lives lost from the BP off-shore oil rig disaster was obvious. What we wanted from our high school and college students entering this month's writing contest was not their outrage about how this could have happened, but rather, share one solution (big or small) that can help combat man's ever-reaching environmental impact.



Prompt: **What important life lesson have you learned from a teacher?**



“A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell, where his influence stops.” --Henry Brooks Adams

We know that there have been certain teachers and classes in the past that stand out in your mind...

- Classes that made memories.
- Teachers that inspired you to do something different.
- An educational experience that re-shaped your views on the world.
- A class that was more entertaining than YouTube (is that possible?)

Think back to a favorite class or educator (teacher/coach/director/principal). Whether it was their attitude, the way they taught, or a life lesson you learned from their class/sport/activity, how did this person make a positive impact in your life?