



UU Writers

The Gifts of Justice & Equity



Participant Packet

February 2024

Personal Warm Up Prompts

Ease your way into this month's theme with one or more of these prompts. Use them as a free association exercise. Don't try to create a full or finished piece of writing. Simply take around 5 minutes to jot down bullet point thoughts, a short intuitive response, idea fragments or maybe even sketch some images. Have fun getting your creative juices going!

Option A: What was your first moment of fighting injustice *as a child*?

Option B: What was your first moment of fighting injustice *as an adult*?

Option C: How have you changed your mind about what it takes to achieve justice? And how has your involvement changed over time?

Option D: What personal or societal injustice has most shaped your life?

Option E: When the enormity of injustice looms, what enables you to hold onto hope?

Option F: Listen to and reflect on one of these songs on *The Gifts of Justice & Equity*:

I Find It Hard to Say - Ms. Lauryn Hill

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43niOeHfXKk&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP5cKaiV3fBJ0_XCOXI8gJXW&index=14

Get Free - Mereba

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MiyqikCvw&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP5cKaiV3fBJ0_XCOXI8gJXW&index=2

Trouble of the World - Mahalia Jackson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHOGs5jxG-w&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP5cKaiV3fBJ0_XCOXI8gJXW&index=13

*p.s. If music is your writing muse, you might want to check out our entire **Soul Matters music playlist** on *The Gifts of Justice & Equity*:*

Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on [The Gifts of Justice & Equity](#).

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [The Gifts of Justice & Equity](#).

Writing Project Exercises

Suggested Steps:

Step 1: Which project exercise/prompt is yours and why?

Spend some time reflecting on the options below. Treat it as a spiritual discernment exercise, in which you try to discern which option seems to be emotionally pulling you towards it. For those who are comfortable, you might think of it as asking, “Which exercise is my inner voice inviting me to explore?” Or to put it another way, the goal is to figure out which exercise is “yours” and why that is so.

Step 2: First thoughts

Write whatever comes to mind in response to the exercise you selected. Free associate using words, sentence fragments, images.

Step 3: Write your piece

Write your reflection, poem, story, song, or story inspired by your writing.

Take your time. For some, their piece will spill out whole cloth in a matter of moments. For others of us, it will be a journey of twists and turns, with us writing and rewriting as first drafts open us to new insights, inspiring second drafts, and even thirds.

Option A: The Power of Getting Proximate

Bryan Stevenson is a lawyer, author, and founder of the Equal Justice Initiative. At the center of his work fighting for the poor and incarcerated sits the idea of “Getting proximate.” It’s the idea that to change the world, we must get close to those on the margins. We must hear what they have to say. We must see the world with their weary eyes.

This is how he put it in [one of his speeches](#):

“It’s actually in proximity to the poor that we hear things that we won’t otherwise hear, that we’ll see things we won’t otherwise see. The things we hear and see are critical to our knowledge and our capacity to problem solve.”

Use your writing this month to explore this idea from a personal angle. When did someone’s willingness to get close help heal an emotional, racial, economic injustice in your life? When did getting proximate help you understand or more deeply commit to a justice issue? If you grew up with poverty or another kind of injustice, what do you want others to know about the power of proximity? If you grew up without poverty or another kind of injustice, how do you think you were subtly or not-so-subtly taught to keep your distance from not just the poor and oppressed but also the pain of the poor and oppressed? What is keeping you from getting proximate to the poor and oppressed around you today?

As you engage these questions, we encourage you to watch this short video of another one of Stevenson’s talks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMKIpycFaOg>

Option B: Exploring How Class Has Shaped Us

[Classy](#) is a podcast that is getting [a lot of buzz](#). In it, the host, Jonathan Menjivar, explores how class and class inequities shape our social interactions. But what makes the podcast special is the way Menjivar vulnerably explores how class has shaped *him*! This vulnerability opens space for us to explore our own vulnerabilities around class.

For this prompt, we suggest you focus on episode two: [A Classy \(and Uncomfortable\) Laugh with Terry Gross](#). This episode gets at how those of us who grew up poor or working class often contort ourselves as we navigate interactions with “higher class” folks and as we climb the so-called class ladder. It also lifts up how shame and self-doubt can become constant companions during that journey.

Use your writing this month and this podcast to explore how class has shaped you? Have you too been tempted to contort yourself because of class? Would you, like Menjivar, say that shame and self-doubt were constant companions for you because of your class? Were there other companions that were just as challenging, and painful?

Option C: Changing What We Can't Accept

I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change.

I am changing the things I cannot accept.

- Angela Davis

We all know what it is like to accept things we are convinced we can't change. Society and our brain are so good at offering us reasons why social issues are too big, too entrenched, too far away for us to impact them.

And... we also know what it is like for the façade of those “facts” to slowly melt away, revealing themselves to be falsehoods and justifications.

Use your writing this month to tell the story of what that “melting away” was like for you. What caused it? What kept that melting from happening sooner? What was your first reaction? Did you accept it? Did you regroup and try to make up new justifications? Did you feel guilt or shame? Did you feel free?

And while you are at it, maybe write a bit about how it feels to be able to say out loud, “I am changing the things I cannot accept!”

Option D: Saving and Savoring

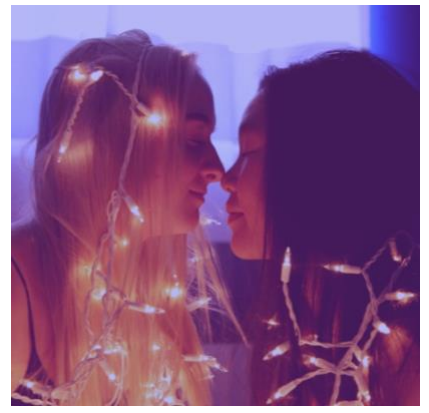
“It's hard to know when to respond to the seductiveness of the world and when to respond to its challenge. If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I arise in the morning torn between the desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.” - E.B. White

Have you ever struggled with the competing desires to [save and savor](#) the world? Make a list of what you savor in life and what you would like to change and improve. Use your writing this month to explore and articulate what came up for you as you wrote out your list?

Option E: Visual Prompts

This prompt is all about letting an image spark your writing. Below are a handful of pictures related to our theme of *the gift of justice & equity*. Look them over until one reaches out and asks you to write about it!

For some of us, the image that stands out will take us back in time to a memory we want to write about. For others, our chosen image might inspire us to write a fictional short story based on it. For still others, a picture will evoke a new perspective about the theme that we will then tease out in our writing. *(Or maybe these pictures remind you of a favorite picture you took recently or have treasured for a while. If so, great! Write about those pictures instead.)*



Option F: Let a Movie Guide You!

They rarely consider writing prompts, but who says movies and TV can't inspire our writing. In fact, sometimes nothing can take us inside or open us up like a great movie or TV show can.

So with that in mind, this assignment invites you to watch a movie or TV show about justice and equity and then use your writing to engage/articulate/explore what comes up for you.

There are millions of great justice and equity films, so pick one that you've been dying to watch. But if you need some help, here are some we suggest:

- [Full Time](#)
- [The White Lotus](#)
- [Descendant](#)
- [American Fiction](#)
- [Killers of the Flower Moon](#)

Option G: Make a Case for Hope... or Chat with It!

How do you hold on to hope in a world so overrun with injustice and inequity? It's a very real question for a growing number of us. As the facts look more fearful, conversations get meaner and divisions widen, it's hard to imagine how the current tides will turn.

And... making a case has always been hard. What's always made the difference are [those who tried](#) to defend hope anyway.

In that spirit, use your writing this month to make your own case for hope. You are welcome to design it around what you think others need to hear, but maybe the most important tactic is designing it around what *you* need to hear.

Another angle is to write up an imaginary conversation between you and Hope. You might start off by asking Hope where they have been lately. Or what scares them the most. Or confront them about why they betrayed you and see what they have to say.

Or maybe forget the dialog and just ask Hope what it wants to say to you. Just ask, "Dear Hope, what would you have me know today?" then write down "Dear [*insert your name*]" and start writing from there.

Option H: Make Your Own Way

Our prompts are here to support you. So, if none of the above prompts speak to you this month, feel free to find inspiration on the theme from wherever it comes.

Whatever it is, let the gravitational pull of memory, reflection and the pulse of your personal imagination be your guide. Let love take you where it will.

Closing & Companions Words

Choose one of the pieces below that speaks to you. Read it after completing your writing projects as a way of celebrating your writing journey this month. Or read the words regularly while working on your project prompt to keep you grounded and inspired. It sometimes helps to write them out and tape them above your desk or on your bathroom mirror, living with them during the month

May we remember the wounds of the past that bleed into the present so that we may heal and grow into the future together, whole and wise. May we remember and be free at last.

[Jabari S. Jones](#)

May we go forth to meet
oppression with freeing justice,
hatred with healing love,
and despair with unfailing faith.

Rev. Tess Baumberger

May all sentient beings be well
and enjoy the root of happiness:
Free from suffering and the root of suffering.
May they not be separated from the joy beyond sorrow.
May they dwell in spacious equanimity
Free from craving, fear, and ignorance.

Bodhisattva Vows

May we see all as it is, and may it all be as we see it.
May we be the ones to make it as it should be...
This is redeeming the pain of history with the grace of wisdom,
This is the work...
To be the barrier and the bridge.

[Andrea Hawkins-Kamper](#)



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