

For Staff: Group Activities for Youth

Writing Your Life

Freewrite and Discussion: 15 minutes

Ask everyone in the group to write down one or two ideas for a story about a time in their life when they changed, or learned something. Tell them the lesson or the change can be as big or as small as they like: for example, figuring out how to adapt in a new foster home, or a way to be close to a sibling who lives somewhere else, or how they overcame a bad habit or behavior.

Write the following prompts on the board and ask teens to answer these questions as they write their ideas:

- What is your story about?
- What happens in the beginning? (This should be before the change happens)
- What happens in the middle? (HOW did you change or learn something? What did you do, or not do? What was hard about it?)
- What happens at the end? (What did you learn, or how did you change?)

Read the Story: 10 minutes

As a group read, “Writing Saved My Life,” by Zaniyah Solis-Fearon (p. 4) aloud, taking turns. Let teens pass if they want.

Discussion: 15 minutes

Ask the group where Zaniyah chose to begin her story and why [15 years old, entering the residential facility, she was angry and didn’t know why].

Then ask them to identify a few points from Zaniyah’s story’s middle where she changes [starts writing and performing in her facility; discovers *Represent* and realizes someone cares what foster kids go through; starts writing for *Represent* and explores her own past and emotions; faces up to the fact the gang is bad for her; pushes through answering the hard questions so she can get paid and have a story she’s proud of].

Ask them, Where does Zaniyah end her story? [She eliminates violent people from her life; figures out a lot of her anger is at herself; is more honest and kinder to herself.]

Finally, ask, What do you think Zaniyah got out of writing the story? [Any of the above answers.]

Optional Sharing and Closing: 10 minutes

Invite the youth to share their story ideas if they like. Before closing, encourage them to keep working on their stories and next session, to report back anything they figured out while they wrote. ■

Activism 101

Freewrite and Discussion: 10 minutes

Ask the group what they think it means to be an activist. [An activist is someone who works for political or social change.]

Then write on the board the following prompt:

— Is activism only something that adults can do, or can teens be activists and work to make change for issues they care about? Explain.

Give teens about five minutes to write their responses. (They will not have to turn them in.) Then invite anyone who wants to share to read their responses aloud.

Read the Story: 10 minutes

As a group, read “Sticking With Black Lives Matter” by Demetria Mack (p. 7) aloud, taking turns. Let teens pass if they want.

Discussion: 10 minutes

Ask for examples of how Demetria and her group became activists to support the work of Black Lives Matter [discussed news, learned about relevant topics, and developed partnerships], and what they plan to do in the future [invite local activists to speak, host an assembly, teach workshops to teens, distribute information].

Ask the group to list the obstacles Demetria and her peers face as teen activists. [Keeping interest in the group alive, finding productive ways to channel anger and frustration, having suggestions be ignored, needing teachers as advisors, raising money, etc.]

Ask the group to brainstorm strategies and projects they would try if they were a part of the Black Lives Matter group at the writer’s school. As group members brainstorm ideas, you can jot them on the board.

Closing: 10 minutes

Ask each teen to write down one issue or topic that gets them frustrated or angry, which they could work to change through activism. Then, have them write about the kind of change they would want to see and identify one strategy they could use to help make that change happen. Then invite anyone who wants to share to read their responses aloud. ■