

THE FREEDOM WRITERS DIARY: Reflection
Mr. Irwin, Ninth Grade English/Keystone

Name: _____

Directions: Below are the individual sections that will constitute our study of The Freedom Writers Diary. You are provided with both general information and a series of reflection questions. You must respond in a thorough, thoughtful paragraph for at least three reflection questions from each entry collection (for a total of three paragraphs per section).

POVERTY

Fast Facts

- 13.2% of Americans – or 39.8 million Americans – live in poverty. Some estimates claim that an additional 2.6 million Americans have been plunged into poverty as a result of the 2008-2009 economic recession, pushing the total count to 42.4 million people.
- African Americans have the highest rate of poverty (24.7%), followed by Hispanics (23.2%), Asians (11.8%), and Non-Hispanic Whites (8.6%).
- 13.3 million people living in poverty are under the age of 18.
- 46.3 million Americans lack health insurance.
- Failing to invest in the education of impoverished kids translates into “reduced employment and lower wages, higher rates of early and nonmarital childbearing, and lower incomes” for those individuals once they become adults.

Sources: The US Census Bureau, The Washington Post, Institute for Research on Poverty

Reflection Questions

Diary 1: This student passes judgment on Ms. Gruwell and the other students in the class without waiting to get to know them first. Why do people label one another? How would you have been labeled if you’d been sitting in that classroom?

Diary 13: The writer explains his struggles of not having a father as he grew up and his realization that his friend also had to grow up without a father figure: “I feel sorry for him. I knew how hard it was to grow up without a father.” Have you or someone close to you grown up missing a parent? Describe how this has affected you or a person close to you.

Diary 69: This student writes, “It’s easier to pretend I don’t live where I live or see what I see.” We all have a need to escape our reality from time to time. Describe a time when you had to escape the reality of your life.

Diary 100: After being evicted, this writer states, “It seems like hope is the only thing I have to hold on to.” What is meant by this? Explain a time when you felt like hope was the only thing you had to hold on to.

Diary 101: This Freedom Writer talks about being an A and B student until he/she was left alone to run a house and take care of a younger sibling. Describe how you have felt when someone has been too busy or did not take the time to listen to you when you were in need of help. Describe your feelings and what you did to move forward.

DRUGS AND VIOLENCE

Fast Facts

- Children are more likely to use drugs or alcohol in high school if they see their parents using drugs or alcohol.
- Nearly 9 million kids 12-17 claim that they can have access to prescription drugs within a day or less.
- Teens who get drunk at least once a month are twice as likely as their non-drinking peers to know someone who has been forced to do something sexual that they didn't want to do and are four times as likely to know a guy who uses drugs or alcohol to hook up.
- Almost 850,000 people are estimated to be in gangs in the United States.
- Hispanics make up the largest percentage of gang members (47%), followed by African Americans (31%), Whites (13%), and Asians (7%).
- Murders committed by people under the age of 18 account for approximately 10% of all murders in the U.S.
- Juveniles account for 16% of all violent crime arrests; this includes aggravated assaults (14%), forcible rapes (17%), and weapons charges (24%).
- In the 1998-1999 school year, 34 school aged children were murdered on or near school grounds. That said, approximately 67 youth have been killed in Chicago between 2007 and the present.

Sources: National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, Faith and Service Technical Education Network, National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center, The New York Times

Reflection Questions

Diary 3: This Freedom Writer got jumped by five other students. Why did they go after her? Why does she vow to get revenge on these five even though they are “just like” her?

Diary 4: The writer of this diary fled from the scene of a fight, worried about being blamed for the actions of friends. Think of a time when you or someone you know was blamed for something for which they weren't responsible. Explain what happened and how the person reacted to the blame.

Diary 7: This writer describes getting jumped into a gang as “worth it.” What have you or someone you know done that was “worth it” that someone else may not understand? Explain why it was important?

Diary 15: The Freedom Writer considers gang rivalry: “It's stupid because I don't even remember why we are rivals. That's just the way it is.” Think of a past grudge, rivalry, or problem you have had with another person. Explain the root of the problem and how you chose to solve it.

Diary 34: In this entry, a female student describes how she seemed a “goodie goodie” on the outside, yet was really an alcoholic. She showed the world one persona and kept another to herself. Think about your own life. How is the person you show the world different from the person you keep to yourself? What could keep a person from showing the world who they truly are?

Diary 50: The author of this entry has an addiction to drugs and states, “In some sick way I wish I could get caught so all this lying could be behind me.” Why would someone wish to get caught doing something they constantly try to hide?

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Fast Facts

- Approximately 1.3 million women and 835,000 men are physically assaulted by an intimate partner annually in the U.S.
- 3.5 million people reported domestic violence between 1998 and 2002.
- 13% of college aged women report being stalked during one six to nine month period.
- 78% of the victims of sexual assault are female; 22% are male. It is believed that sexual assaults against males are under-reported due to social stigma.
- 8 out of 10 sexual assault victims know their attacker.
- 18-24 year-olds comprised only 11.7% of the population in 1998 and 2002, but were the majority of victims of violence committed by a boyfriend or girlfriend (42%).
- One in five high school girls reports being assaulted by a dating partner; physical aggression occurs in 1 out of every three high school relationships.
- Between 3.3 million and 10 million children witness domestic violence against a parent each year.

Sources: The American Bar Association

Reflection Questions

Diary 62: The writer of this entry recalls how she was molested by a family member she trusted. Describe a time when you were betrayed by someone you trusted. What was your reaction?

Diary 63: This Freedom Writer describes physical abuse at the hands of her boyfriend. She writes, “Unfortunately, we gave each other what we were both missing.” There are many theories as to why women stay with men who mistreat them physically, emotionally, or both. Why do you think people who are being abused stay with the abuser? What can be done to stop and prevent abusive situations?

Diary 64: The writer of this entry feels the need to act as protector to an abused mother. Think of times in your life when you needed help or protection. Who was there to offer you safety? Describe a time when you were called upon to protect someone else.

Diary 65: This Freedom Writer describes feeling liberated after purging the emotions that have been bottled up as a result of continuing domestic abuse. Consider your own life. To whom or what do you turn when you need to unload the stresses you are facing? Describe the feeling you have afterward.

Diary 72: This student writes about dealing with a painful truth from her past. Consider your own life. What would you do if given the chance to write your own truth and share it with others? What would inspire you to share your truth? What reservations would you have about making it public?

Diary 118: This Freedom Writer’s father inflicts abuse on the writer and the writer’s siblings. The author ends the entry by saying that they will break the cycle of abuse. We learn many things from the positive role models around us and sometimes even more from the negative role models. Write about a person that you view as a negative role model and what they taught you.

DEATH

Fast Facts

- The average life expectancy in America is 77.7 years.
- Nearly 2.5 million people die in the U.S. each year.
- 631,636 people died last year of heart disease.
- 121,599 people died accidentally in the same time frame.
- 15,707 people died as a result of homicide in the same year.
- The three leading causes of death among teenagers are accidents, homicides, and suicides. The most common accidental deaths among teenagers are the result of auto crashes.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Library of Medicine – National Institutes of Health

Reflection Questions

Diary 6: The writer of this diary describes witnessing the death of a friend. Examine how this death affects the way the Freedom Writer feels about people and life. What other changes might someone experience after the loss of someone close?

Diary 33: The writer of this diary entry describes being torn between loyalty to her people and telling the truth to save an innocent man. Think of the reasons for making either choice. Which would you have done if you were in this writer's place? How do you make difficult choices in your life?

Diary 66: In sharing the loss of a brother, this Freedom Writer states, "No matter how bad the situation got, and how many times the doctors told me he was going to die, it just didn't sink in." It's very difficult to deal with a friend's or loved one's serious illness. How would you handle a similar situation? What advice or questions would you have for someone who is currently going through a similar situation?

Diary 93: This Freedom Writer explains the difficulty of speaking up in the face of evil. Consider times when others have had the chance to speak up but didn't. What factors make speaking up difficult to do?

Diary 94: In this entry, a Freedom Writer argues that people should "rock the boat" when they witness an injustice. Have you observed an unjust action or behavior? What did you do? If you could go back in time and revisit that moment, would you handle it differently?

Diary 112: In this entry, the writer tells of a tragedy, his dad being shot in the head, and "living with a scar" from the experience. Reflect on your own life. Describe the "scars" you are living with. Do you try to hide them or wear them proudly?

Diary 113: This Freedom Writer must confront a mother's death and the speed with which it came. Rather than turning to friends to help with the grieving process, the writer chooses to shut down and turn away from the outside world. Think of a time when you wanted to turn to others for support but couldn't. What kept you from doing so? How can you choose to open up in the future?

DISCRIMINATION

Fast Facts

- 33,973 people filed a complaint of racial discrimination at the work place in 2008.
- Women earn approximately 84% of the salary earned by their male counterparts.
- 50.8% of hate crimes are racially motivated, of which 69.3% were targeted towards African Americans.
- 64.8% of religiously motivated hate crimes were against Jewish individuals or establishments; the number of hate crimes against Muslim Americans is on the rise.
- 31.1% of all hate crimes involve some form of assault.
- More than 800 active hate groups exist in the United States; 16 are located in Indiana.
- 86.2% of gay or lesbian students experience some form of harassment or violence at school; accordingly, gay youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.

Sources: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Urban Ministry, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Southern Poverty Law Center, GLSEN

Reflection Questions

Diary 2: This student describes how strictly segregated the high school quad is at lunchtime. Choose an area of your own school or community and describe how certain crowds “own” different spaces. Explain what would happen if someone from one crowd tried to join another. What would be the positive and negative consequences?

Diary 10: This Freedom Writer chose not to take part in a school walkout, deciding to seek sanctuary in Ms. Gruwell’s room instead. Describe a place or activity that provides you safety or peace when you are feeling stressed or pressured. What does it offer you that no other place or activity can?

Diary 29: In this entry, the writer describes a situation where he suffered discrimination because of the way he was dressed. Think about how other people react to your own appearance. Describe a time when you or someone you know was treated differently from others because of what you were wearing.

Diary 54: The writer in this entry describes some of the labels that she feels are attached to the African American race. Think of positive or negative labels that have been attached to your race(s). Write to describe the ways you have accepted or ignored these labels and whether or not they’ve come to define the way you see yourself.

Diary 84: In this entry, the writer describes how watching a movie makes him relive an attack that members of the Ku Klux Klan made against him. The entry concludes with the words “I guess some things never change...” Consider what you know about hate and intolerance throughout history. Do you believe people’s treatment and understanding of others is improving or not? Support your thoughts with specific examples.

Diary 127: In this entry, the writer discusses her fears about not being accepted by friends and family because of her sexual orientation. Think of an instance in your life where you were not sure whether you would receive the support and respect of those you love. How did they end up reacting? Explain how you dealt with their reactions.

PEOPLE WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Fast Facts

- 61.8 million Americans – or 26.4% of the population – volunteered in some capacity for a non-profit organization last year.
- 21.9% of people between the ages of 16 and 24 offered volunteer services.
- 42.2% of college graduates over the age of 25 completed volunteer work.
- Volunteers spent an average of 52 hours in service; teenagers 16 to 19 volunteered an average of 40 hours while kids 12 to 18 averaged 29 hours.
- 35.1% of volunteer settings were religious in nature, followed by children or youth organizations (26%) and civic groups (13.5%).
- The National Association of Letter Carriers – that’s right, postal workers – collected 73.4 million pounds of food for donation this year alone.
- Despite the efforts of the Freedom Riders and the Little Rock Nine, school segregation is on the rise. 70.2% of African American students attend minority-majority schools; 36.6% of Latino students do the same, up from 23.1% thirty years ago.
- That said, students at Turner County High School held their first integrated prom in 2009.

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Harvard Gazette, National Corporation for Public Service

Reflection Questions

Diary 21: The writer of this diary entry recalls a panel discussion that showcased individuals who overcame obstacles in their lives and became successful. Think of the obstacles in your life and your own set of strengths. What strengths do you possess that will best help you meet with similar success?

Diary 22: This Freedom Writer writes about feeling like Cinderella at the ball. She also states the thing she’s missing out on most is not the “fancy stuff” but bonding with her father. Think of the adults in your life. Describe the one to whom you felt closest. Explain the relationship.

Diary 74: In this entry, the writer quotes his/her mother having said, “One person can make a difference that can change the whole world.” Think of a famous person or someone you know who has changed or is in the process of changing the world and describe their achievement.

Diary 75: This Freedom Writer found a sense of purpose in learning about the Freedom Riders, stating, “That purpose is to make a difference that can change the whole world.” Think of a famous person or someone you know who has changed or is in the process of changing the world and describe their achievement.

Diary 106: This student shares how meeting a mentor opened doors to her future. Consider what you want to do with your future. How could having a mentor assist you in reaching those goals?

Diary 119: In this entry, the writer talks about meeting Peter Maass and what that felt like. The writer asked a “tough” question of Maass – about whether he “just stands there watching people die” or if he does something. Have you ever had to act like Maass and observe a dangerous act?

Diary 128: In this entry, the writer describes the sacrifices her mother made to ensure the safety of her family. Think of someone you know personally or from a book or movie who sacrificed a lot for the sake of others. What decisions or sacrifices would you have made if you were in this other person’s shoes?

SELF RELIANCE

Fast Facts

- Ralph Waldo Emerson was born on 25 May 1803.
- Emerson attended both Harvard College (1817-1821) and Harvard Divinity School (1825).
- Emerson was ordained a Unitarian minister in 1829 but resigned his pastorate in 1832 due to internal religious struggle.
- “Self Reliance” is published in 1841.
- Transcendentalism was a 19th Century American political and literary philosophy of which Emerson was the central figure. The central notion is that the spiritual nature of man goes well beyond the physical realm and is realized through intuition rather than doctrine. Emphasis is placed on the individual rather than institutions; harmony is sought between the individual and his surroundings.

Sources: The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Reflection Questions

Diary 55: This student ends the entry by writing, “No one really understood what I was feeling. They were so caught up in what they thought about me that they didn’t really care.” Reflect on a time when you felt misunderstood. Write to explain why others did not understand you. What did you or could you do to help them have a better picture of who you were?

Diary 56: The writer in this entry who witnessed a boy being beaten wrote, “Even though I could have been hurt, I wish I had done something.” Put yourself in this writer’s shoes. Share what you would have done in a similar situation. Did you ever face a comparable choice?

Diary 57: The writer of this entry states: “A truly self-reliant person finds his weak link and strengthens it.” Everyone has unique strengths and weaknesses. Think of one of your “weak links.” Plan the steps you will take to strengthen it.

BEING THE CHANGE

Fast Facts

- 75.6% of Richmond High School seniors graduated in 2008; that is an increase of almost 24% in four years.
- The national graduation rate for the same year was 71%.
- Workers without a high school diploma earned an average of \$18,734 last year. High school graduates pulled in \$27,915, college graduates raked in \$51,206, and people with advanced degrees (masters, doctoral, professional) averaged \$74,602.
- Teenage sexual activity and birth rates are consistently reaching new lows.
- 60% of children aged three to five who are not in kindergarten are being read to daily by someone at home.
- Volunteer rates among teenagers 16 to 19 have more than doubled since 1989.
- 10.6 million kids between the ages of 12 and 18 participated in school based service in 2005.
- “Students who report doing better in school are more likely to be volunteers than students who report doing less well, and are also more likely to have been involved in community service as part of a school activity.”

Sources: Richmond Community Schools, U.S. Census Bureau, The New York Times, Corporation for National and Community Service

Reflection Questions

Diary 31: This student writes, “I was always known as the person that was going to be a druggie, or get pregnant before I turned fourteen and dropped out. Now I have the chance to prove them wrong.” What expectations are put on you because of your past actions? How do you feel about this? Explain what you will do to improve those expectations.

Diary 87: This Freedom Writer is surprised to realize the value of education. Think of where you want to be in five or ten years from now. How can you best take advantage of your education to reach your goals?

Diary 90: The student in this entry reflects on overcoming many roadblocks to achieve success and admits there were ample opportunities to give up. Did you ever contemplate giving up in your life? What kept you from giving up? Describe the factors in your life that make it easier or more difficult to persevere.

Diary 107: In this diary, the author has a chance to help other students by finding out about their lives and listening to what they have to share. Think about what you have been through in your life. What experiences and skills could you use to help a child who needs to look up to you?

Diary 140: This Freedom Writer hated going to rehab but came to realize it was the right decision. Describe a time that you had to do something that you “hated” but looking back later realized that it was the best thing for you.

Diary 142: This Freedom Writer looks back on four years with Ms. Gruwell and admits no one could have predicted the success of the Freedom Writers from the first day of freshman year. The writer talks about Room 203 as the focal point for bringing a group of people together who normally would not socialize with one another. Describe a place or group that you are a part of where you connect with people who are different from you. How did those connections form?