

WRITEGIRL PLANET

MEMOIR WORKSHOP

Issue No. 6



IN THIS ISSUE:

- **MEET OUR SPECIAL GUESTS**
- **MEMOIR, WHAT IS IT?**
KEREN BREAKS IT DOWN!
- **WRITING EXPERIMENTS FOR YOU**
5 ACTIVITIES TO GET YOUR MEMOIR WRITING FLOWING
- **THE WORLD AT YOUR FINGERTIPS**
5 PLACES TO EXPLORE ONLINE



PLUS
YOUR SELF-CARE TOOLKIT

May 9, 2020



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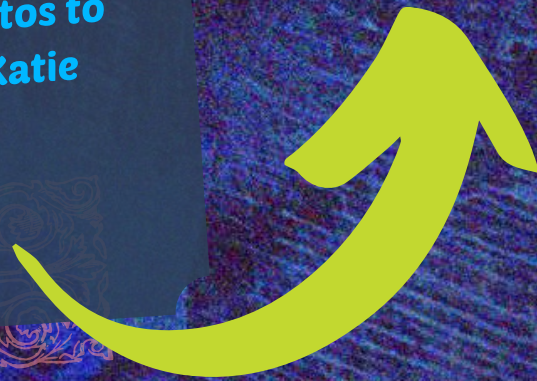
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NOTE: Throughout this issue of The WriteGirl Planet you will find some vintage black and white photos to help inspire you. These are Katie Geyer's real family photos!



HOW TO USE THIS AT HOME

1

Stretch your arms up to the sky and take some deep breaths!



2

Grab your journal and a pen. (Or a paper bag – any paper works!)

3

Browse this “WriteGirl Planet” and find something that intrigues you.



4

Take a break for a healthy snack!

5

When you feel like you’ve achieved something, throw yourself a mini-dance party! Circulation is good for writing inspiration! (Or just give yourself a round of applause!)



6

Here are some fun flashback photos of in-person workshops:

MEET OUR SPECIAL GUESTS!

Mandy Burnett

Mandy Burnett is a writer, speaker and a real live person outside of the internet! She's a mom, a bonus mom, a wife, sister, daughter and a riot. Mandy majored in Organizational Psychology, owned a Cold Stone Creamery, co-produced an independent film, and sold everything under the sun, proving there are no rules to what you can be! Growing up in a large family belonging to a strict and consuming religion, she's worn every mask you can think of and finally decided to take them off and live her own life, the way she wants, as herself. Mandy's on a mission to build community amongst women as we lean into our own brand of extraordinary, one story at a time, starting with hers in her upcoming book, *I Think I'm Doing This Wrong*. She plays hard, loves hard and writes like she's running out of time.

Website: www.mandyburnett.com

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WRITING TIP: When writing about our own lives, we write without editing, telling the story our heart needs to let out and, only after, do we edit out that which we're not ready to share with the world. Write what you know, where you're at. Your experience and perceptions are uniquely yours and no one else can write what you can.

MEET OUR SPECIAL GUESTS!

Samantha Dunn

Samantha Dunn is the Executive Editor of *Coast Magazine* and the author of several books including the novel *Failing Paris* and the bestselling memoirs *Not By Accident: Reconstructing a Careless Life* and *Faith in Carlos Gomez*. Her bylines have been featured widely in national magazines like *O the Oprah Magazine*, *Ms.*, *InStyle* and *Glamour*, among others. Sam's essays and short stories are anthologized in a number of places, including the short story anthology, *Women on the Edge: Writing from Los Angeles*, which she co-edited. She has also written for the stage and taken a few turns screenwriting as a member of the Writers Guild of America. Sam teaches at Chapman University and the literary nonprofit Writing by Writers. She now directs the Esalen Institute Writers' Camp founded by Cheryl Strayed.

Website: SamanthaDunnWriter.com

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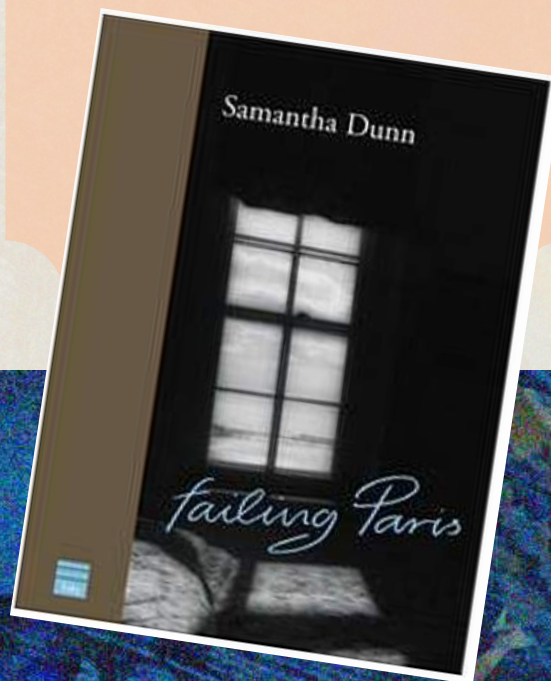
Instagram: [@SamyDunn](https://www.instagram.com/SamyDunn)

Other Social Media: [@CoastMagazineOC](https://www.instagram.com/CoastMagazineOC)

Upcoming Events: Writing by Writers online craft talk, "This is the Voice," June 1st at www.writingxwriters.org/craftseminars



WRITING TIP: Write as if you are talking to someone you like, who is sitting across the table from you or next to you on a bus.



MEET OUR SPECIAL GUESTS!

Rory Green

Rory Green is a writer with an MA in Integrative Arts Psychotherapy. After immersing herself in both professions, she decided to merge her passions and create **Write To Be You**, a reflective writing experience designed to unlock creative blocks and explore authentic voice and self-compassion. Rory has worked therapeutically with children and adults in London and Los Angeles where she currently facilitates her workshops. A previous participant described the workshop as a “supremely creative environment with ideas to short circuit the critic and unleash the beast, the child, the truth teller, the dreamer within...” Rory’s mother, the trailblazing author Jackie Collins, always told her that girls can do anything, a mantra that helped reveal to her that self-belief is the key to creative freedom.

Website: www.writetobeyou.com

Twitter: [@WriteToBeYou](https://twitter.com/WriteToBeYou)



WRITING TIP: Be brave when you're writing! Remember when you were a little kid and would get lost in the 'playing zone' exploring, experimenting, trying things out? Give yourself full permission to PLAY ON THE PAGE!

“I am the sole author of the dictionary that defines me.”

– Zadie Smith, an English novelist, essayist and short story writer known for her treatment of race, religion and cultural identity.

MEET OUR SPECIAL GUESTS!

Tembi Locke

An accomplished actor with over sixty television and film appearances including *The Magicians*, *NCIS: LA*, *Bones*, *Eureka* and the Netflix comedy *Never Have I Ever*, Ms. Locke is the author of the *New York Times* bestselling memoir and Reese's Book Club May 2019 pick *From Scratch: A Memoir of Love, Sicily, and Finding Home*. Along with her showrunner sister Attica Locke, Tembi is developing and writing a Netflix limited series based on her book. Zoe Saldana will star and serve as Executive Producer along with Reese Witherspoon and Hello Sunshine.

Website: www.TembiLocke.com

Twitter: [@TembiLocke](https://twitter.com/TembiLocke)

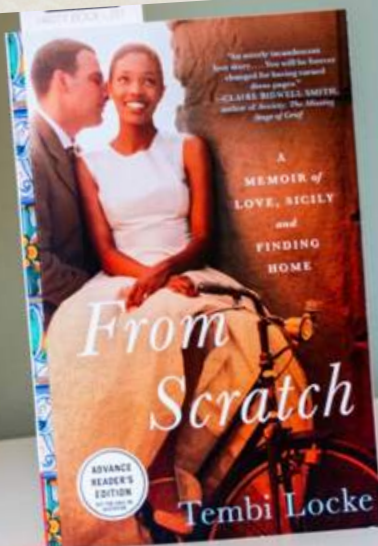
Instagram: [@TembiLocke](https://www.instagram.com/TembiLocke)

Upcoming Projects: Currently developing a Netflix limited series based on *From Scratch*.



WRITING TIPS:

- 1.) Be authentic to your voice.
- 2.) Keep a journal.
- 3.) With creative non-fiction, you get to shape and structure the events and experiences of your life into a narrative that is as creative and unique as you. Be bold and willing to try lots of structures for your story.
- 4.) Read everything.



MEMOIR: WHAT IS IT?

KEREN BREAKS IT DOWN BY ASKING HERSELF A FEW QUESTIONS

Keren asks: *What is “memoir” and why does that word sound so, well, old-fashioned or something?*

Keren answers: Ah, *mon ami!* The word “memoir” comes from the French word *mémoire*, which means “memory,” or “reminiscence.” The literary technique of writing a memoir is all about writing the true stories of your life.

Keren asks: *So how is memoir writing different from writing your autobiography?*

Keren answers: An autobiography is the whole story of your life whereas the craft of memoir writing is about telling various stories about aspects of your life or certain moments or events in your life. It is also less French.

Keren asks: *Don't I have to have something really dramatic about my life in order to write a memoir, like a near-death experience, or that I lived alone in an attic for a long time, or adopted a baby lion and grew up with it as my sister, or that I hoard more books than any other human being? Isn't that the kind of stuff I need to have done in order to have something interesting to write about?*

Keren answers: No. Your life is interesting just the way you live it. No near-fatal accidents, hoarding, or baby lions needed, just honesty and specific sensory details about moments, people, events, thoughts, and feelings you have experienced.

Keren asks: *So how can a WriteGirl get started?*

Keren answers: The best time to write is...now. Just pick up a pen and paper and start writing. Start with a stinky smell – that will get you going, I promise. Write about a time when you smelled something really, really disgusting. Where were you? What happened? What did you do? Who were you with? And away you go, c'est la vie....you are on your way to writing a memoir!

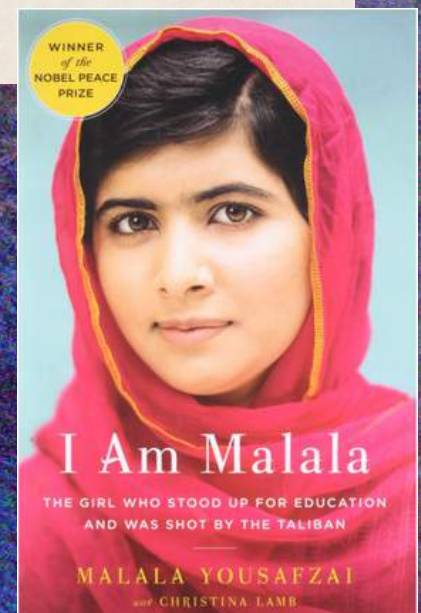
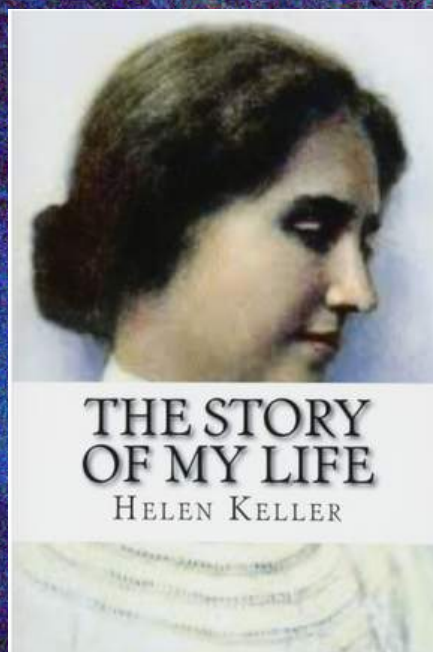
Keren asks: *What are some acclaimed memoirs worth reading?*

Keren answers: Oh là là, there are so many! But here are a few selections we highly recommend:

Becoming, by Michelle Obama

The Story of My Life, by Helen Keller

I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban, by Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb





WRITING EXPERIMENTS FOR YOU, FROM WRITEGIRL



WRITING THE STORIES OF ME

Overview

Your Life Is A Cake

To write memoir, focus on small moments. Imagine your life as an enormous cake. An autobiography is about the whole cake. Memoir is about only one slice of that cake. You can have many memoir-worthy moments! If you have lots of memories you want to write about, great! Tell us about all the different slices of your cake.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

- 1. Choose five memorable moments** or periods in your life – those ‘Aha!’ moments that changed the way you saw yourself or others. Maybe your moment is something funny, or dramatic or moving. Perhaps you mastered a new skill, experienced a new place or a familiar place in a different way, or stood up for a friend or had someone stand up for you. What did you want or need in that moment? Did you get it? If so, how? What did you discover about yourself on the way? Pick one of those moments and write about it as vividly as possible.
- 1. Dig into the Details:** Imagine yourself back in the moment. What are you wearing? Describe the colors and the feel of your clothes against your skin. Where are you? What time of day is it? What is the weather like? Use all your senses to take us there. What do you see, feel, hear, smell, taste? We want to experience all that too! See if you can include descriptive words and imagery to paint a vivid picture. “I had been dragged onto the dive team” shows, without telling, that the writer is unhappy about where she is. Describing the diving board as “a blue plank of doom” and the waiting water as an “enemy” adds to the sense of dread.

WORD SPARKS

5 STEPS TO TAP INTO YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS TO SPARK PERSONAL STORIES

1. QUICK! Write down 30 words that feel good coming out of your pen...words with crunch, words with bite, evocative words or elegant words that float off the tongue.
2. Scan your word list and look for a theme... Food? Childhood? Your hometown? Family?
3. Highlight 5-10 words that speak to you. These will be your “word sparks.”
4. Write the words down in your journal. Leave enough space between each word to write a few sentences or a paragraph under each one.
5. Go through the words, one at a time, and feel the energy of each word. Use that energy to free-write a paragraph inspired by each word.

Did you know?

Writers often start by writing about one subject, but when they let their subconscious take over, their stories often take a different turn. Don't be afraid to use your everyday writing “sparks” – words, events, prompts, inspirational books – to take you to uncharted territory. The fun is in the discovery!



“Read a thousand books and your words will flow like a river.”

– Lisa See, Chinese-American writer and novelist who writes about the intersection of family, friendship and history.

ROLLERCOASTER

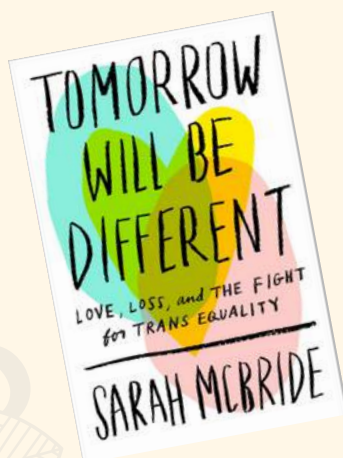
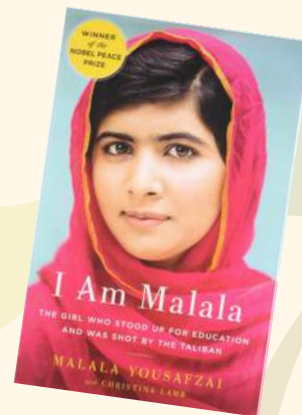
5 steps to tap into your subconscious to spark personal stories

Dive right into the main action of your story to grab our attention and make us want to know more. Think of your story as a rollercoaster. Drop us into the action at the top of the rollercoaster, in that moment before you hurtle down the other side. Then go back and explain what happened on the climb – what got you to that point? How does your perspective change by the time you get to the end of the ride?

Check out these examples of writers diving straight in. We immediately want to know more of their story:

"I come from a country that was created at midnight.
When I almost died it was just after midday."

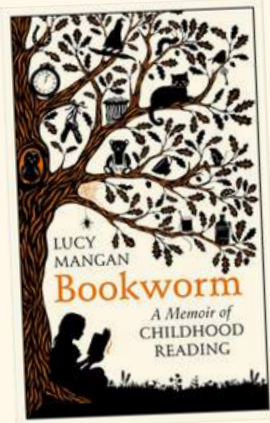
– Malala Youfsazai, *I am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*



"It's rare to know in real time that what you are about to do
will define the course of the rest of your life."

– Sarah McBride, *Tomorrow Will Be Different*

WRITING EXPERIMENTS

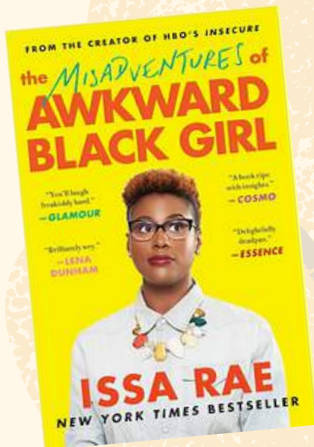


"I spent most of my early years – aged one to three, say – being trodden on."

– Lucy Mangan, *Bookworm*

"Waldo, a double-pint-sized stuffed walrus, was given to me on my eighth birthday by the most beautiful woman in the world..."

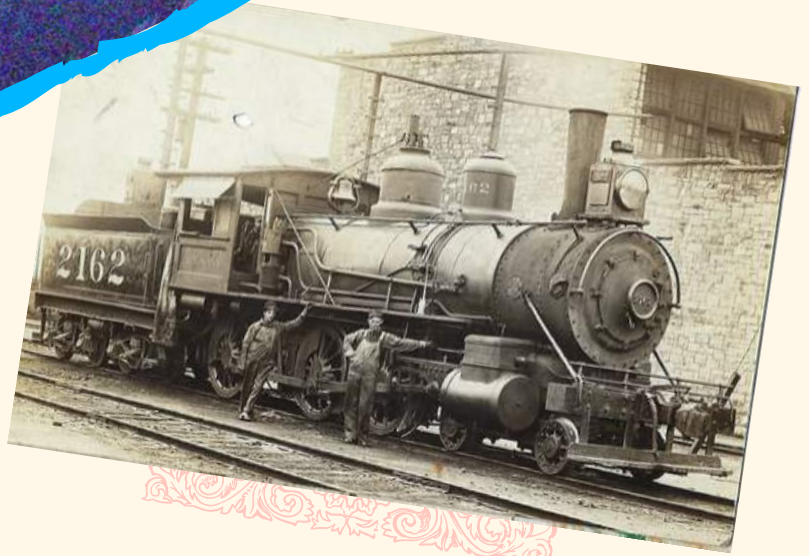
– Ellie Kemper, *My Squirrel Days*



"My name is Jo-Rae Issa Diop and I've always wanted a nickname."

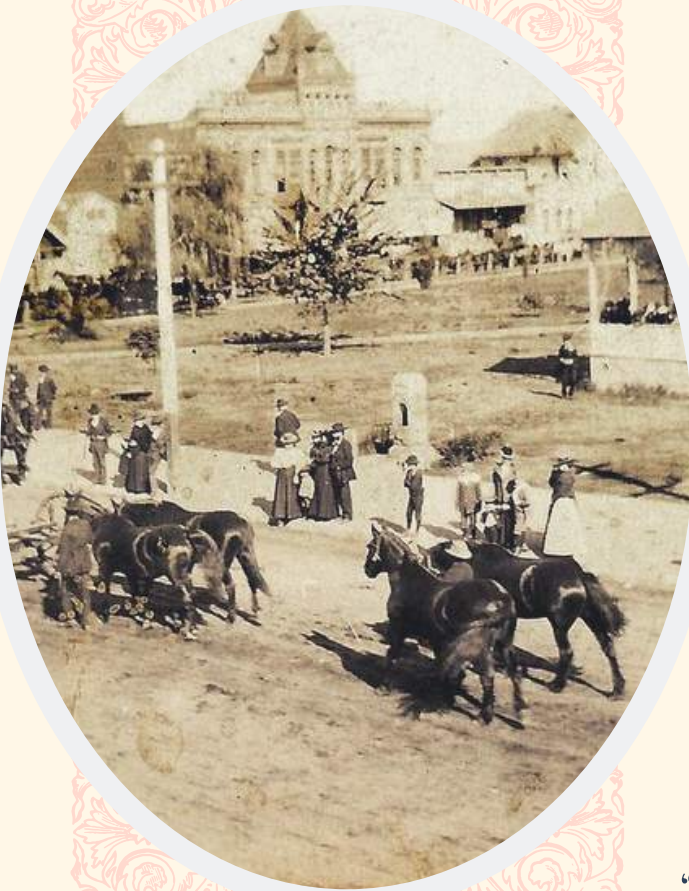
– Issa Rae, *The Misadventures of an Awkward Black Girl*

WRITING EXPERIMENTS



WRITING TIP!

If you read something inspiring, save it! Bookmark it, doggy-ear it, highlight it, cut it out, copy it in your journal — whatever you prefer. Keep it in a safe place where you can go back to it for inspiration. Behind every great piece of writing sat an author who was stuck but pushed through. You can too!



Before putting pen to paper, make a list. Make a plan. Have a goal, even if it's to write one good sentence. Forging a path toward a destination makes the blank page a lot less scary.

“To write something you have to risk making a fool of yourself.”

– Anne Rice, American author best known for her gothic novels about vampires and other supernatural creatures.

“If I waited for perfection, I would never write a word.”

– Margaret Atwood, Canadian writer best known for her prose fiction and her feminist perspective.

WRITING EXPERIMENTS

EVERYONE HAS A STORY (OR 100 OF THEM!)

Choose someone as an interview subject. Talk to them on the phone, FaceTime or Zoom. Prepare questions for your interviewee in advance. Questions can be about anything: the subject's childhood, where they've lived, school life, travels, etc. Sit down for the interview and take notes. After the interview, read over your notes and choose a single aspect of the interview for a deeper dive (e.g. Moving to Los Angeles from Kansas City; their new gardening hobby; an award they once received). Schedule a second interview and prepare your questions in advance, focusing on just that aspect of their life. After the second interview, use the fodder from both interviews to tell a story about that single aspect of your subject's life.



TIP: Keep it open! Unlike “yes” or “no” and other single-answer questions, open-ended questions (*What inspired you? How did you do it? Why did you move to Los Angeles?*) spark interesting — and more specific — answers. **Open-ended** questions also lead to longer discussions and new ideas!



WRITING EXPERIMENTS

EXPLORE YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

A photo can spark many questions, and many stories. See if you can find a photo of a family member from the past, or a photo of a place in the past that is somehow connected to your family. Use the photo as a jumping off point to write about your family. If you cannot find a photo, you could ask a family member to tell you about a memory from the past – use that conversation to write about your family.



WRITING TIP!

Don't judge! We are often our own worst critic, which stifles creativity. Designate your journal as a safe space where your mind and your pen can wander freely, without fear of judgment.

WRITING TIP!

Dig into details! Chipped nail polish, an unmade bed, a ticking clock, the smell of soup bubbling on the stove, hot tea scalding the tongue. It's the details that make your writing specifically you.

THE WORLD AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!

Check out these digital resources and explore the world without leaving your room!

Writing Wisdom from Alexa Donne:

Visit WriteGirl mentor Alexa Donne's writing and publishing YouTube channel, which has over 350 videos including writing pep talks, craft chats, writing hacks, author interviews, book reviews and publishing advice.

youtube.com/c/alexadonne



Daily Writing Prompts from Liz Cotone:

WriteGirl Volunteer Liz Cotone is posting free daily writing prompts for all ages on her website. www.lizcotone.com/



What the World Needs Now:

Boston Conservatory at Berklee student Shelbie Ressler convened a virtual orchestra of 74 of her peers to create connection in a time of physical distancing. When songwriting team Burt Bacharach and Hal David released the song "What the World Needs Now Is Love" in 1965, the United States was deeply divided over the war in Vietnam. Bacharach was initially nervous about the song's reception given the fragile cultural environment, but the song became a top ten hit and brought people together under its call for unity. Enjoy this performance! [Click here to watch on YouTube](#)

THE WORLD AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!



Share Your Book Discoveries:

Los Angeles County Library invites you to share reviews of the books you've been reading and offers the chance to win a Kindle at the end of the summer. Sign up for the Spring and Summer Discovery program here!

<https://lacountylibrary.readsquared.com>



750 Words a Day:

Want to commit to a steady writing habit? 750 words a day seems like a good place to start – if you were writing a novel, that would be three whole pages! Even if all you want to do is journal, this site shows you how and keeps you on track with lots of fun charts and rewards.

<https://750words.com>

SELF-CARE TOOLKIT

The Power of a Smile

Did you know that forming a smile can relax hundreds of muscles in your body and bring joy through physiological changes to your nervous system? Smiling is scientifically proven to release neurotransmitters including endorphins (natural pain relievers) and serotonin (natural feel-good relaxers), making us feel good both physically and emotionally. When you smile, others see an attractive, sincere, caring and relaxed person. A smile is also contagious: When you smile, the world smiles back!



“Each time you smile, you throw a little feel-good party in your brain.”

Read more in this article in *Psychology Today*.

TRY THIS:

See what happens when you genuinely smile more often – to family members, online, during Skype or FaceTime conversations. Write down what you notice!



SELF-CARE TOOLKIT



Coping with Stress

This whole #stayhome thing can be stressful, so here are a few more self-care tips to help you stay calm and healthy:

- Take breaks from watching, reading or listening to news stories, especially on social media. The news can be upsetting. Keep in mind that news outlets are working hard to get your attention, to get you to watch and listen. There are no news outlets that just simply state the facts – we would be bored silly!
- Use the term “physical distancing” instead of “social distancing.” Keep a six-foot space between you and others, but keep on connecting with your friends and family by phone, email, text and video. Those relationships are important – and even if you are not in a talkative mood, they most likely will be very glad to hear from you.
- Find ways to express your emotions safely. Talk openly with a close friend or mentor who will listen to you and not judge or try to “fix” you. And hey, your journal is also a great non-judgmental place to share your feelings. Your journal will never criticize you or make fun of you.
- Treat your body well and don’t forget to eat your fruits and veggies!

For additional resources to help you and your family, please visit [the Center for Disease Control \(CDC\) website](#), which lists a great deal of information and resources.





We want to read your writing! Submit it on the WriteGirl Clubhouse Page!
www.writegirl.org/writegirl-club-house

WHAT'S NEXT?

WriteGirl Spring Fundraiser
Bold Voices: A Live Music Festival Benefit for WriteGirl
Saturday, May 30th

Live performances on Facebook by Clare Means, Molly Kate Kestner and many more! Timing, complete line-up and details TBA.

WriteGirl FICTION Workshop
Saturday, June 13th
11 AM - 12:30 PM

We will help you explore your creative imagination and invent captivating stories, supernatural characters and fantastical worlds that only you can create! Via Zoom - watch your email for the link!

**SPECIAL THANKS FOR
SUPPORTING OUR WORKSHOPS:**



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We're here
for you!

