

Boise High School  
Artists: Sadie Schrenkeisen, Luan Teed, Karl Wagenman and Ginal Werdel – Teacher: Katy Shanafelt

## Dust

My grandmother,  
her bones caked with desert sand  
with skin thick as leather  
told me I had grit.  
Gazing down at unblemished  
hands,  
I wondered where it was.  
Now I've found it;  
mixed with blood on my lips,  
ground into my road-rash palms,  
ringing in my ears,  
smoldering in my chest  
as I heave myself up from the dust,  
determined to show them  
that down is the last place I'll stay

Linnea Boice  
Boise High School  
Kathy Rotchford – Teacher

# Stories of Transformation

## 8th Annual Writing Challenge

**O**ur communities are full of diversity, and diversity gives our communities strength. The world we imagine allows each and every one of us to be able to access both the feminine and masculine parts of ourselves. In this world there is no shame in being exactly who you are! Healthy masculinity and femininity mix in a million different ways to make us uniquely ourselves. In this world each one of us holds our own truth and lived experience!

Gender is one of the core ways we learn to identify and express ourselves. Gender is socially created — it's something we learn — not just something we inherit through our biology. We learn and create our gender through our relationship to ourselves and our interactions with the people around us. But, even though it is created it is still very real. It shapes each of our experiences in profound and different ways.

When identities like gender, race, and many others are linked to power, control and domination, many people are devalued just for being who they are. When people are devalued we can create harm, including hurtful words, bullying, discrimination, and eventually physical violence.

The good news is that we can change this. We can give gender new meanings that respect people for who they are! We can interrupt social norms that give rise to gender violence, or violence targeting women, girls, and people who are gender oppressed, by redefining what gender means to us and valuing everyone in our diverse communities!

We invite you to express your lived experiences and challenge the idea that some genders have more value. We invite you to explore what a new world could look like if we dream big and recognize our interconnectedness.

## Stories of Transformation Writing Challenge Rules

### How does it work?

Create an original poem or essay! Writing must be 75 words or less (title does not count) of an original work related to one of the six themes outlined on the following pages:

- Connection
- Personal History
- Imagining Another World
- Collective Liberation
- Interrupting Gender Injustice
- Wholeness and Gender.

You can submit up to three poems or essays. Write in the language where you can best express yourself. Over 100 poems or essays will be selected that are creative and capture the spirit of one of the themes.

### Who is eligible?

Student authors should be in Idaho middle school/ junior high school or high school - public, private, or alternative school settings.

### Deadline

Deadline for submission is midnight Friday, December 16, 2016.

### Awards

Authors of the top 10 selections for the middle school/ junior high school or high school categories will receive \$100 and a t-shirt. Authors of the 100 or more of the top writings selected for publication will each receive \$25 and a t-shirt. Middle School/Junior High school and High school books will be released in February 2017.

All published works will list the author, teacher and school. Books will be distributed to Idaho's secondary schools. Make sure your school is represented!

### How to Enter by Friday, December 16th

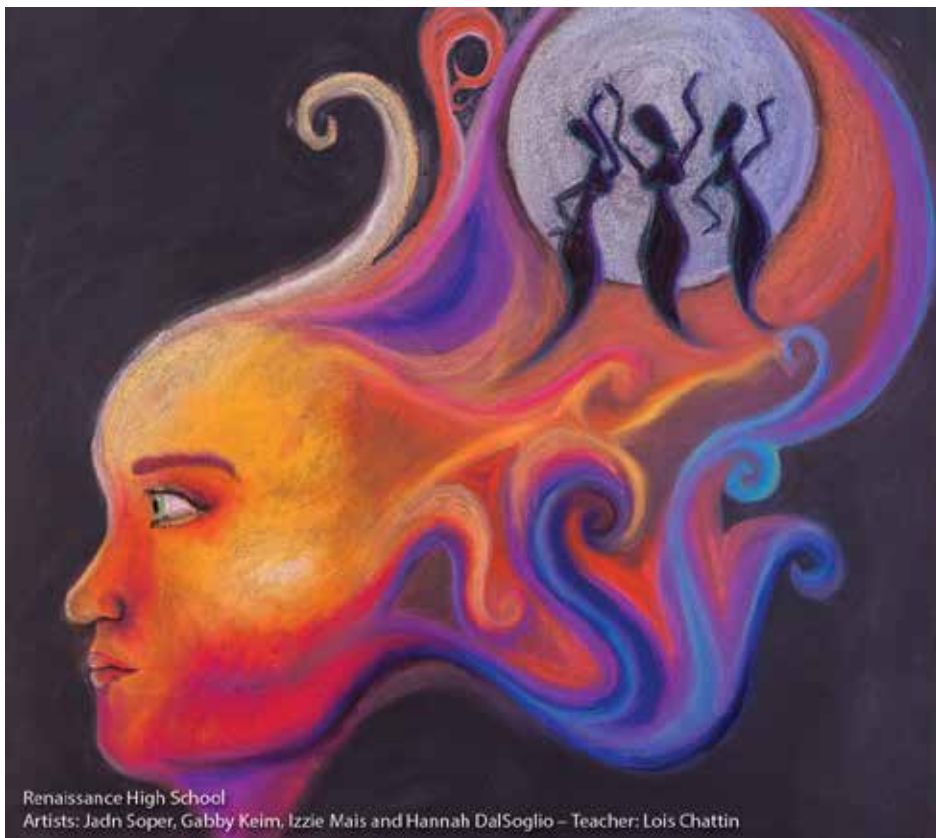
1) Log on to [www.ourgenderrevolution.org](http://www.ourgenderrevolution.org) and enter your submission online, or

2) Mail your writing submission, name, address, cell phone number, school name, grade, and teacher's name to:

Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence  
Linen Building, 1402 W. Grove Street  
Boise, ID 83702

### Questions?

Questions? Contact Dalton at the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence at [Dalton@engagingvoices.org](mailto:Dalton@engagingvoices.org).



My father chiding, wipes away  
my makeup  
"Boys and girls are like day  
and night."  
All my life, I've walked in daylight  
With clear, masculine boundaries  
As my sisters thrive under the  
moon, dancing  
Others in the day tell me,  
"Be strong, manly."  
But the stars nurture graceful  
kinds of strength.  
I adore the warmth of day, but  
I envy those who succeed the  
sun, for they are allowed  
To be beautiful

Tairex Clayton  
Middleton High School  
Melinda Garcia - Teacher

Renaissance High School  
Artists: Jaden Soper, Gabby Keim, Izzie Mais and Hannah DalSoglio - Teacher: Lois Chattin

**Writing Prompt on Connection: Describe the part of yourself that already understands its deep connections with all living things. What does this self want you and others to experience, understand and feel? Inspired by poet Joy Harjo.**

**Eagle Poem by Joy Harjo**

To pray you open your whole self  
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon  
To one whole voice that is you.  
And know there is more  
That you can't see, can't hear;  
Can't know except in moments  
Steadily growing, and in languages  
That aren't always sound but other  
Circles of motion.  
Like eagle that Sunday morning  
Over Salt River. Cirled in blue sky  
In wind, swept our hearts clean  
With sacred wings.  
We see you, see ourselves and know  
That we must take the utmost care  
And kindness in all things.  
Breathe in, knowing we are made of  
All this, and breathe, knowing  
We are truly blessed because we  
Were born, and die soon within a  
True circle of motion,  
Like eagle rounding out the morning  
Inside us.  
We pray that it will be done  
In beauty.  
In beauty

We are part of the living world. Each one of us is dependent, in multiple ways, on the earth and each other. When any one of us is harmed it ripples out and impacts all of us in ways we cannot necessarily see. Violence against the Earth is also violence against people because people depend on the Earth!

For example, there are currently enough resources, food, energy, water and materials in our world for everyone. Yet, the imbalance of power and control over these resources has forced many people to live without the basic things they need to live. Water is poisoned in order to mine coal— leaving communities without water, and the land toxic. Land is farmed in ways that strip it of its natural ability to regenerate and feed the people who live near it.

It is our duty to be able to care for the environment as much as it is our duty to care for each person in our society. Addressing violence against people is important, but we must also be aware of our society's tendencies of exploiting the earth. What connections do you see between violence against people and violence against the Earth? What would be different if we saw the world in this way?



**Get Started!** Imagine the roots underneath a tree, and imagine those roots stretching out and connecting to others beneath the earth. Now imagine you are the tree and your roots are stretching

far beyond yourself. What do they touch? Use all of your senses to explore and understand the network of connections. Describe what you feel, see, hear, taste or smell and what you are you curious about. What does interconnectedness feel like to you?

When you feel this connection to all living things, what stories come to mind? What do you wonder about? What do you want to be a part of? How do the stories intertwine?

When you imagine the parts of you that could change the world for the better, describe what you feel. Is that self any different than the way you are now? Why keeps you from being that person fully? Once you've imagined this self, put it in conversation with the world outside. What does it say?

## Writing Prompt on Personal History: Tell the story of your people. Who are your people? Where have they been and what has happened to them? What has been the source of their resilience? What has or could healing look like in and beyond your community? What is the future you long for your community? Inspired by author Junot Diaz

We all have stories, histories, that shape who we are. These stories shape our identities and our relationships to each other and the world. Our shared histories are not just about the past; they inform who we are today and how we understand each other.

The dominant power given to some identities, and not in others, can each be traced back to specific times in our shared history. Some of these stories were traumatic and caused great harm. Others were about resilience and survival, ingenuity and healing. So many things happened in history both good and bad for all of us to exist on the same space and time.

If we are to avoid repeating past traumas, each of us has a responsibility to use our privileged identities to undo the structures that benefit us unfairly. We can begin by telling the stories that have been strategically hidden from sight. We can listen to each other's stories with ready hearts, and minds. We can deepen our awareness of the brutality of which our privileges were born from, and open ourselves to the possibility of a different, shared future.

Look, without our stories, without the true nature and reality of who we are as People of Color, nothing about fanboy or fangirl culture would make sense. What I mean by that is: if it wasn't for race, X-Men doesn't sense. If it wasn't for the history of breeding human beings in the New World through chattel slavery, Dune doesn't make sense. If it wasn't for the history of colonialism and imperialism, Star Wars doesn't make sense. If it wasn't for the extermination of so many Indigenous First Nations, most of what we call science fiction's contact stories doesn't make sense. Without us as the secret sauce, none of this works, and it is about time that we understood that we are the Force that holds the Star Wars universe together. We're the Prime Directive that makes Star Trek possible, yeah. In the Green Lantern Corps, we are the oath. We are all of these things — erased, and yet without us — we are essential. **Junot Diaz**



**Get Started!** What shaped you? When you think about what shaped you and where you came from, what stories do you tell? How do the stories of our ancestors inform who we are? How do the stories of your ancestors – known and unknown – inform who you are?

Why is it important to remember where and whom we came from? How does knowing our story turn us into the people we are? Sometimes the stories that formed us can be painful or scary to think about. How do we and our communities heal from those stories? How do we tell our story and let the page bear the weight of it? What are the healing stories? If you could talk to your ancestors, what questions would you ask them? What would you want to know? How would knowing your people and where they came from lead to healing?

## Writing Prompt on Imagining Another World: Envision a radically different world rooted in courageous love and mutual responsibility. Where do you see signs that this new world is “already on her way”? Inspired by author Arundati Roy

The (dominant) culture we live in is rooted in domination, extraction and violence. This culture harms all of us and creates ways of life that are not sustainable. When imagining what the world could be like with compassionate communities at the center we also boldly question what it means to exist within the current systems. We have the opportunity to imagine and redefine a society where everyone is loved, valued and is able to reach their fullest potential. Though we cannot undo the atrocities of history, we can take action to promote social equity for those that were affected and move towards the world we want!

We believe another world is possible, where domination and violence against one another and our earth no longer occurs and our world is rooted in interdependence, resilience, and regeneration. We cannot have what we are not willing to become. We need to imagine the unimaginable!

**Get Started!** Take several minutes to “time travel” to this other world – a world of courageous love and mutual responsibility. Listen for the breath of the new world and let your longings rise to the surface. When you travel to this world of courageous love and responsibility what does it feel like, look like, sound like, smell like, and taste like? Describe this world in vivid detail. How would you define courageous love, what does it look like in action? Is this world something that only exists in your imagination or have you experienced it in some way in the present? Given the responsibility, how could you make it real? If you’ve seen glimmers of this world, what could you do to fully realize it? What needs to happen? What is it like once you’re there? What is it that you know, and feel to be true that everyone deserves? What is it like to act out of shared responsibility and abundance?

“Another world is not only possible she’s on the way and on a quiet day if you listen very carefully you can hear her breathe” **Arundati Roy**



Boise High School  
Artists: Katie Biedeback, Jerusha Maury, Sitara Mohr and Olivia Terry – Teacher: Jared Hopkins

### Glass Bird

I told him I couldn't live without him  
and he believed me  
The glass of our friendship clutched  
in his hand  
My existence tied to his hold on me  
His masculinity proof of power  
My femininity proof of weakness  
The past is my soul sold to him -  
The future is freedom  
The now is  
I do not call for his presence to  
calm me  
He tells me I can't live without him  
But I can

Dayna Torp  
Boise High School - 10th grade  
Sharon Hanson - Teacher

## Writing Prompt on Collective Liberation: **None of us are truly free from violence and domination until all of us are free. Write about why and how this is true for you. Inspired by poet Audre Lorde**

### **A Woman Speaks by Audre Lorde**

Moon marked and touched by sun  
my magic is unwritten  
but when the sea turns back  
it will leave my shape behind.

I seek no favor  
untouched by blood  
unrelenting as the curse of love  
permanent as my errors  
or my pride  
I do not mix  
love with pity  
nor hate with scorn  
and if you would know me  
look into the entrails of Uranus  
where the restless oceans pound.

I do not dwell  
within my birth nor my divinities  
who am ageless and half-grown  
and still seeking  
my sisters  
witches in Dahomey  
wear me inside their coiled cloths  
as our mother did  
mourning.

I have been woman  
for a long time  
beware my smile  
I am treacherous with old magic  
and the noon's new fury  
with all your wide futures  
promised  
I am  
woman  
and not white.

Liberation is more of an action and a state of being than a thing!  
Liberation is a practice and lifestyle in which we work to recognize of everyone's humanity, including our own!

We do not live single issue lives and we do not live our lives in isolation. Even if we ourselves do not experience oppression, odds are we live in community with those who are actively marginalized in some way. When anyone marginalized, it comes at a great cost to everyone in the community whether we see it or not. Liberation is not just an individualistic approach to reaching our own fullest potential, but also our neighbors' and community members' too! Our communities thrive only when everyone has a part in the creation of a new world and everyone benefits from it!

**Get Started!** Okay, now let's think really BIG! Take a few minutes, close your eyes if you would like to. How would you and the people around you act if we no longer had a culture of domination or control based on who we are (based on our gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation)? Re-imagine a world based in respect, mutuality, cooperation and sustainability. How would you think and act if you could really, fully be who you are? What concrete steps could you take on a daily basis to make this world a reality? What actions could we take together across the barriers that divide us? Start close to home. Where do you see injustice in your school or community? What could we do together to change those things? What would change if you reached out to one person across the divide, and then another, and another?



## Writing Prompt on Interrupting Gender Injustice: **Your choices have power. By choosing how you respond to behaviors or statements that objectify or devalue girls and women or people who are gender nonconforming, you make a statement about what you value. Write about a moment when you made a choice about gender. Inspired by Maya Angelou**

Interrupting oppression when it is happening is important! It can be a small moment, but that changes the way we think about girls and women and people who are gender nonconforming. We make one choice at a time! Being an activist is something that we can take with us and apply to all parts of our lives! An activist is not just someone who goes to rainy protests or serves our communities through projects; an activist is also someone who steps in when there are moments of injustice of which requires us to be bold! We have endless opportunities to make bold choices.

**Get Started!** Let's start with a brainstorm. Can you think of a time when you felt like a choice you made had strength and power to make change? What gave it that power? What made you decide to speak up? Describe what that looks like to you. How did you feel—use as many of the senses as you can. Now rethink that moment and rewrite it to show what it would feel like if your choice didn't have power, or you were rendered voiceless because of that choice. What would you say? What would you do? Describe what a moment like that can look like, what a moment like that can do.

Alternately, think about a moment when you felt silenced. Describe this feeling. Next, rethink this moment and imagine that you were able to move forward and have agency. What changed? Then, think of a time you stood up for yourself and made your voice heard from a place of love? Describe what it felt like once you realized your power, once you felt the liberation that comes from responding from a place of love and strength. What supported you to stand up for yourself?

### **Still I Rise by Maya Angelou** (excerpt)

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may tread me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.  
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise. [...]

I rise

I rise

I rise

## **Writing Prompt on Wholeness and Gender: Much of our understanding and experience of gender is socially and culturally constructed. As children we learn what to be, think and do based on the gender we are assigned at birth and the culture we live in. Yet to be whole, we all need to have access to full range of human emotions and behaviors, regardless of our gender. Write about your experience of this. Inspired by Sherman Alexie**

We all learn how to be our genders as we grow up. Girls (and children assigned to be “female” at birth) learn that they are supposed to be caring and that they will be rewarded for looking feminine. Boys (and children assigned to be “male” at birth) learn that they are supposed to be strong and assertive and appear dominant over others. Our Gender Revolution knows those messages are wrong and seriously limiting. Every person has the ability to be both caring and nurturing and also be a strong leader in our communities. Gender is a performance that we take on every day. We can learn of the things that allow us to be fully human!

**Get Started!** Write about how we can authentically be ourselves, whole and complete human beings that are not restricted by gender stereotypes or biases. Describe what that feels like. Where does your own story of transformation start? What does it feel like? What have you learned and discovered along the way? What do you hope and long for next? Does a story of transformation ever end? How do we encourage stories of transformation; both for ourselves and for others?

### **How To Write The Great American Indian Novel by Sherman Alexie (excerpt)**

All of the Indians must have tragic features: tragic noses, eyes, and arms. Their hands and fingers must be tragic when they reach for tragic food.

The hero must be a half-breed, half white and half Indian, preferably from a horse culture. He should often weep alone. That is mandatory.

If the hero is an Indian woman, she is beautiful. She must be slender and in love with a white man. But if she loves an Indian man

then he must be a half-breed, preferably from a horse culture.

If the Indian woman loves a white man, then he has to be so white

that we can see the blue veins running through his skin like rivers.

When the Indian woman steps out of her dress, the white man gasps

at the endless beauty of her brown skin. She should be compared to nature: brown hills, mountains, fertile valleys, dewy grass, wind, and clear water.

[...]

There must be redemption, of course, and sins must be forgiven.

For this, we need children. A white child and an Indian child, gender not important, should express deep affection in a childlike way.

In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written, all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts.