



Writing Lesson | Your Wildest Dreams for 2020

Students will read and respond to the YES! article “Alicia Garza: How to Prepare for 2020” by Kate Werning.

Lots of things may keep students up at night or make them anxious—from grades to fitting in to climate change, mass shootings, and hate groups. The author, who’s also the director of Healing Justice Podcast, reached out to Alicia Garza, co-founder of #BlackLivesMatter, to help guide us into the new year. Garza reminds us that “Clarity inside of chaos can help us find direction when it seems like everything around us is unstable.”

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Alicia Garza being honored at the 2019 Triumph Awards at The Apollo Theater on October 21, 2019, in New York City.

Photo by Johnny Nunez/Wireimage/Getty Images.



“Alicia Garza: How to Prepare for 2020” by Kate Werning

Who’s ready for 2020?!

As we head into the next decade, many of us are already worn down, discouraged, and exhausted from the rapid-fire struggles of the past three years and beyond. We are still feeling the freshness of the cries of “don’t let this become the new normal!” from early 2017, while witnessing the bizarreness of it all come to pass. For many of us, finally entering the year 2020 doesn’t exactly come along with a sense of ease.

Healing Justice Podcast is building infrastructure to support the relational, emotional, and physical needs of folks committed to the work of social justice. HJP has curated the voices of leaders all over the world about how we can move through intensifying times with powerful focus, strength, grace, and victory. And the challenge of how to

prepare ourselves for 2020 felt deeply personal and political, emotional and tactical, spiritual and strategic.

That’s why we at HJP reached out to Alicia Garza — principal at Black Futures Lab, co-founder of #BlackLivesMatter Global Network, and leader at National Domestic Workers Alliance and Supermajority — to guide us into the new year. Alicia partnered with HJP to create an audio/visual practice that is not just rooted in the individual, but guides us through articulating the political contributions we want to make in the coming year.

As Alicia shares in the podcast:

2020 is quickly approaching, and along with it, one of the most important elections quite possibly

of our generation. For those of us who are working for social change, 2020 is an opportunity for a rematch, but it can also produce a lot of anxiety. There's a lot at stake with this upcoming election — not just for who is in the White House, but for the direction of this country for at least the next decade.

Anxiety, fear, sadness — those are all reasonable responses to a high stakes situation. What helps me navigate anxiety about the unknown, or the really scary things that are approaching, is to let my vision of being successful guide me towards what I actually need to do in order to be successful.

I find myself better able to navigate choppy waters effectively if I'm clear about my purpose and the role that I'm playing. Clarity inside of chaos can help us find direction when it seems like everything around us is unstable.

As activists and advocates for social justice, we are often called to reflect on our own lives, and how we want to mobilize for the good of ourselves and our communities. At the turn of each year, however, that reflection for the next 365 days is even more intentional. We deserve to think about this upcoming year from a place of grounded hope, and to make the space to vision what we dream for our own lives, as well as the powerful and focused political commitments we want to make.

As folks striving toward a new world, we have to be committed to grounding ourselves in serious contemplation of what justice and political commitments we want to prioritize as the year changes.

Have you thought about the intentions you want to set for yourself as we kick off this new decade, both personally and collectively?



For your consideration, here are three prompts Alicia uses to guide us through her New Year's Practice:

To try it for yourself, you can set aside 30 minutes either alone or in a group. You can do this exercise with your team or organization, too. Visit the practice page to listen to the audio (also findable under 'Healing Justice Podcast,' or wherever you listen to podcasts) and download the accompanying visual guide to print and use as a worksheet.

1. Clarifying our vision: What are we working toward? What happens this next year in our wildest dreams?
2. Transforming ourselves: What habits and practices will we need to release and cultivate to play the role we want and need to play in 2020?
3. Asking for help: What support will we need, and who can we ask?

We join you in your commitment to your personal and collective good this next year and are grateful for your presence and contributions in our movements for social change. Reflection and planning help us get clear about our most powerful roles, move distractions and busyness out of the way, and allow us to move with purpose.

Let's go together!



Part 2: Writing Prompt

Option One:

Think about what keeps you up at night or gives you anxiety. Now, imagine yourself feeling liberated, joyful, boundless with possibilities. As you begin a new decade and a new year, what might you accomplish in your wildest dreams? Describe the steps you would take to make this vision become your reality.

Option Two:

Think about what makes you anxious or worried about living in America. Now, imagine yourself feeling free, safe, able to thrive. As you begin a new decade and a new year, what in your wildest dreams do you wish for your community or this nation? Tell us about the steps you would take to get you closer to realizing your dream.

Part 3: Writing Guidelines

The writing guidelines below are intended to be just that: a guide. Please adapt to fit your curriculum.

- Provide an original essay title.
- Reference the article.
- Limit the essay to no more than 600 words.
- Pay attention to grammar and organization.
- Be original. Provide personal examples and insights.
- Demonstrate clarity of content and ideas.

Common Core State Standards:

This writing exercise meets several Common Core State Standards for grades 6-12, including W. 9-10.3 and W. 9-10.14 for Writing, and RI. 9-10 and RI 9-10.2 for Reading: Informational Text. This standard applies to other grade levels. “9-10” is used as an example.

Our rubric should serve as a guide, not an unreasonable or rigid standard. You've probably encountered similar rubrics before, but here are two quick pointers for using ours:

1. In the left column, find the criteria for evaluating essays.
2. In the top row, find scores from 4 (outstanding) to 1 (poor).

	4	3	2	1
Focus on topic	There is one clear, wellfocused topic. Main idea is supported by detailed information.	Main idea is clear, but the general.	Main idea is somewhat clear, but there is need for more supporting evidence.	Main idea is <i>not</i> clear. There is a seemingly random collection of information.
Organization	Details are placed in a logical order and the way they are presented effectively keeps the reader's interest.	Details are placed in a logical order, but the way they are presented sometimes make the writing less interesting.	Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.	There is no clear introduction of the main topic or structure of the paper.
Originality and strength of ideas	Formulates a thoughtprovoking, welldeveloped, and fairly original position on an issue.	Writer takes a clear position on an issue, though it is not developed fully.	Writer's position is evident, though it is vague.	Fails to take a clear position, or writer contradicts herself.
Evidence and/or reasoning	Provides specific reasons and/or evidence that demonstrate understanding and insight.	Offers adequate – though perhaps vague or incomplete – supporting reasons and/or evidence.	Provides less than adequate or contradictory reasons or evidence to support position.	Offers only general reasons or evidence or none, or offers evidence contradictory to the writer's thesis or main idea.
Command of grammar and conventions	<i>Command</i> of conventions exhibited. Creative word choice and varied sentence structure.	<i>Correct use</i> of grammar and conventions (for the most part).	Weak control of grammar and conventions. Errors distracting.	Use of grammar and conventions interferes with understanding.
Voice	Author's voice is strong and engaging. Draws reader in.	Writing attracts reader's interest. Author's voice shows engagement with the topic.	Technically well written; however, author's voice is weak.	Writing fails to engage the reader. Does not demonstrate writer's interest in topic.

* Adapted from Rubric for Editorial – Commentary Essay from LAEP.org and the 6+1 Traits of Writing Rubric from Readwritethink.org

Looking Back to Move Forward *Theo Cooksey, grade 8*

I've never really looked at long-term goals for myself, as Alicia Garza suggests in the YES! article "How to Prepare for 2020" by Kate Werning. Other than my goal of reaching Eagle Scout before I turn 18, I tend to live day to day. I'm 13, so shouldn't I just, well, be a kid? Isn't goal planning and future planning something adults do? To be honest, when I read the article and learned what the topic was, I locked up like a clam. Sharing dreams of how I could positively change the world makes me uncomfortable. Why would I open myself up to that level of critique, especially in middle school? Although I would love to see advancements to reduce the effects of climate change and uneven wealth distribution, I can't visualize myself impacting these issues right now.

This led me to wonder why I stopped thinking about my ability to influence the future in a way where anything is possible. What made me narrow my scope and start looking down, rather than seeing my potential? I believed I couldn't possibly change the world if I could hardly impact myself. If you're always working hard at fitting into a world by other's standards, how do you have time to dream of your possibilities? This made me ask, "When did I allow this box to contain me?" When I realized I wasn't accepted as myself.

When I was young, I possessed an immense personality that couldn't be contained. I was a giant, perpetual motor hurling questions, wanting answers, always moving. However, over years of school, my personality withered, and my motor followed suit. Going from a storm to no more than a summer breeze, my motor was barely able to push paper. Why did that happen? I quieted my voice, so I wouldn't be told I was too loud. I suppressed my motor, so I wouldn't be told to stop moving. I spoke less so I wouldn't constantly be told to stop talking and stop interrupting.

After spending so much energy shrinking my personality, I hardly had time to look up and think about what I wanted to do. How do I get back to looking up and out into the world? I believe that this assignment has given me the chance to start doing just that. As I uncoil the past, undo the steps and remember the moments that quieted and contained me, stole my voice, and seized my motor, I am determined to recreate what I lost. I will slowly rebuild my motor into an impervious hurricane that will break out of the box that limited me. My opinion will not be hidden from others.

As I lift my head up, I will start with the small things and my familiar spaces. For me, these are working on what affects me directly, like school and what I enjoy outside of school. I will build the forge in our backyard with my dad to pursue blacksmithing together. I will continue to hone my skills in archery. I will dust off my trumpet and give myself the chance to hit the high notes. I will earn Life Scout rank to put me one step closer to Eagle Scout. By keeping my head up and moving forward with a plan, I no longer need to be the kid who internalized everything.

Becoming a better me now, at 13, will make me a better person who may just be able to influence climate change and build a more equitable wealth distribution system when I get older.

Turning Flowers to Trees

Kira Walter, grade 10

Maybe we used to be trees. Rainforests of friendly monsters, scraping the sky, communicating, and reaching the sun. Maybe roots used to run where we couldn't see them, connecting us to each other and spreading through the world like telephone lines across our continent. But somehow, though the earth stayed warm and the rain fell on our soil, we evolved from trees into flowers. Flowers alone in our own empty fields, roots too short to reach anything.

At a high school with over 1,000 students, I notice how we pass each other on the street, in the hallway, lucky if our eyes meet for a moment, if our hearts touch for a second. We are isolated. Although I hope for a world where none go hungry, where violence is absent, where rivers breathe with cold clean life, and wild creatures run through lush green forests, I first hope for a world where we can connect. A world where America's youth doesn't have to contemplate whether it is better to live in the light or commit suicide in the darkness.

My wildest dream for this nation is that people will reach out to those suffering, to America's youth whose second leading cause of death is suicide. It was not too long ago that a friend approached me about trying to take her own life; she locked herself in a bathroom filled with poisonous gas, waiting for her breath to go soft and blow out like a candle in the wind. We had always been distant, but she chose to share her secret with me because she had no one else to share it with.

According to the Jason Foundation, 3,069 high schoolers in the U.S. attempt suicide every day. Among this group, four out of five leave clear signs of depression. So why do so many signs,

such as drug use, sleep shortages or extreme mood swings, go unnoticed? The answer is isolation. People are so separate from each other that the chances of being discovered are nearly impossible. Although many try to ascribe teen suicide to the pressures of excelling both academically and socially, overcoming these obstacles can be easier than they seem. Easier as long as students have someone to support them through struggles.

Many teenagers who take their lives are members of healthy families and are surrounded by friends, but they feel as if they can't share their troubles with them. They fear that this would be a burden on those they care about and so they remain silent. Teens let dangerous secrets collect like water droplets in a jar. One day, this jar reaches its capacity, problems overcome them, and alone, they surrender. In Kate Werning's YES! article "How to Prepare for 2020," Alicia Garza explains that "clarity inside of chaos can help us find direction when it seems like everything around us is unstable." I dream our community will teach suffering teens to find that clarity – that we will help them blossom on a path to success.

In modern-day society, too many people shame others for attempting suicide. They identify them as troubled and accuse them of being too weak to deal with life's challenges. To combat suicide, I'll make sure to do the opposite. I'll reach out, check in with, and cheer up my peers. I'll try to comfort those in need of comfort. Because in an ever-changing world of frightening dangers and darkness, we need to be trees with roots linked together in harmonious peace. We need to support each other into a new decade, out of the shadows and towards the sun.

Woman with No Nation *Athina Amanor, university*

“You sound like a white girl.” “You’re an American baby now.” “Wow, you actually speak very good English.” “Did you live in a tree?”

As a Ghanaian immigrant living in the United States, I’ve heard it all. Statements from my own family members living back home and from friends I’ve made in this foreign land serve as reminders that there really isn’t a place for me. I’m too American to be African, yet I am too African to be American. Even college professors have laughed while a fellow student mocked a group of African languages by clicking his tongue at me and asking, “What did I just say in your language?” disregarding my offense and reinforcing ignorance. Many of my anxieties and doubts about self-worth stem from these types of interactions. I have adapted, self-monitoring to the highest degree, in order to be more palatable and to fit in.

As an outwardly appearing “African American,” I fight negative stereotypes when interacting with white people, striving for excellence in both academics and athletics and hoping to outrun stereotypes and shatter prejudices. Within the African American community, I appear as a poser. I walk, talk, and think too differently to be welcomed there either. For my relatives, I speak too “American,” too fast, and I stress all the wrong syllables. I’ve carefully created so many personalities, slipping out of one skin and into the next to appease others, that I hardly recognize my true self. So, when I hear words like, “go back to your country,” a tidal wave of confusion hits me. Sometimes I wish I could, but I know the same alienation I feel here would be waiting for me in Ghana because I would still be seen as an outsider. I am a woman with no nation. I worry about being viewed as second class, about not being awarded the same rights and freedoms, about losing my culture, and about losing irreplaceable familial relationships.

So, what in my wildest dreams do I wish for this nation? I wish for acceptance. I wish for understanding. I wish for kindness and an egalitarian mindset for all. I wish for the extinction of xenophobia and the predominance of support. I wish for a community in which I do not feel the need to prove I am not a threat, where my culture is not a trend, and above all else, where being me is enough. My wishes may seem far-fetched and on par with beauty queens claiming to want nothing more than world peace, but I am aware that I must make efforts on my own behalf and not simply put wishes out into the world.

In this new decade, I continue to fight for my dream by working with refugees and building bridges between them and other volunteers as both groups work together to create a safe space filled with the same friendship and sense of belonging that I’ve craved for myself. I continue to make strides towards my dream by rejoicing in differences and staying open to immersing myself in new experiences without judgment. I continue to make leaps in my effort to make my dream a reality by engaging in intercultural, interreligious, and interracial dialogues, fanning the flames of mutual understanding.

And, as I look at the next ten years, I plan to make bounds towards realizing my dream by doing something we all struggle to do in life: to discover who I am outside of the carefully curated personalities I put on and give that person all the support and acceptance I so willingly give to others yet constantly deny myself. This new decade demands that I stop viewing my self-ascribed status as a woman with no nation as weakness, and make way for the potential it holds.

A Borderless World

Sary Barrios, grade 10

As I walk into the kitchen, I see both of my grandmas stirring the masa and my mom putting the tamales de carne on the stove and cutting different fruits to boil in the pot for caliente. It's Noche Buena and my dad, my siblings, and I are hanging ornaments and lights. At the bottom of the tree, we arrange the Three Wise Men and the animals on one side, Mary and Joseph on the opposite side of each other, and place Jesus in his manger at the center of them all. Lastly, we put the star on top of the tree, and turn on the beautiful lights. At 8 p.m., we gather around the table to eat. We pray to God for all the good things he has brought to us in the past year. Then, we pass the tamales de carne around, talk about our family in Guatemala and how they'd decorate their tree with clementines and light fireworks at Christmas, and laugh at my brother's jokes. Everyone is together in one place, one day, one moment. But that's all a dream.

Instead, it's only my parents and me at the table. Some people are able to see their family every single day or at least once a week, but my parents are forbidden to see their relatives. They went through a lot to get here, and they've never gone back to Guatemala. While they are grateful for the opportunities here, the borders they crossed are like a cage, keeping them from seeing their loved ones. So when I dream of a better future, I dream of a world without borders.

These boundaries keep our families apart. A few months before I was born, my dad received a call: my grandpa had passed. My dad had a hard time dealing with not being able to see his father during those last few days he was alive. This was devastating. I see other kids with their siblings, playing soccer, bonding, and telling each other jokes, but I only see my siblings every two years if I'm lucky. I can't imagine how I would feel if my siblings were here. I know I wouldn't feel as lonely as I do now.

It's not easy to be a child of immigrants, feeling scared every second of your life, and constantly thinking about "what ifs." Last summer, when I was at camp in Maine, miles away from my parents, immigration police arrived on my first day. I wasn't allowed to contact anyone, and I had a meltdown. It was heart-wrenching to think about being separated from my parents, and yet these borders have stopped my parents from doing the same—seeing their mothers forever. Can you imagine not being able to see your mother?

A borderless world is like an eagle soaring through the sky, completely free. In a borderless world, families would be united and everyone would live without fear of someone searching for them. In her YES! article "Alicia Garza: How to Prepare for 2020," author Kate Werning says, "We are often called to reflect on our lives, and how we want to mobilize for ourselves and our communities." I often reflect on this beautiful dream that one day our world would be borderless, a dream that I will fight for.

At the camp in Maine, I learned about the Hawaiian word *ohana*. *Ohana* is the spirit of family togetherness. It means that no one is ever going to be forgotten or left behind; they are stuck with each other no matter what. *Ohana* can also mean "nest," which is where birds go to be safe with their families. Just like birds, immigrants want to be with their families in a safe space. Everyone together in one place, one day, one moment.

In My Eyes *Avery Chase, grade 11*

There is a French photographer who said: “I will never be able to take a picture as beautiful as I see it in my eyes.”

Complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) is a rare disease—there are less than 200,000 patients in the U.S. I was a competitive gymnast at nine years old. At a tournament, I awkwardly dismounted from the bars and landed on my ankle. That moment changed my life. For the next eighteen months, I saw six doctors, four therapists, and three psychologists, took three trips to different pain clinics, and missed about 100 days of school to search for answers to “the sprained ankle that could.” I was one of the “lucky” ones. That summer was a revolving door of experts dismissing me one after another.

The pain I experienced was beyond my ankle. I understand that I grew up differently, that most kids don’t divide their family moving cross-country for chronic pain rehabilitation. I have been living with CRPS for nine years—with a brief remission circa seventh grade—and a prognosis of “years to a lifetime.” Some days I’m better at accepting what I know and what I don’t. Other days it’s easier to lie in bed complacent to the pain. No matter what type of mindset, I must constantly strive to recover and hide disappointment every day that wasn’t pain-free. Outsiders haven’t seen the pictures I’ve seen—not through my eyes. Outsiders don’t know what it’s like to watch a 70-year-old squat better than you or realize that the only “record” you hold is “Longest-Stayed Patient,” not “Highest All-Around Score” in a gymnastics meet (where I really wanted to be).

It’s difficult to paint a picture of when my body physically shakes uncontrollably. My eyes scan it slowly, realizing my helplessness. Or the picture of mornings I wake up with a split lip after having habitually chewed it. Or the days I wish I wasn’t a breathing mortgage for my parents. Or the nights I spend praying for the safety switch, trusting my

body will scientifically pass out if pain exceeds a threshold. There are still stories that I can’t tell and stories I don’t want to remember.

In psychologists’ offices, I go mad trying to cling onto any word I can to describe my pain, and, too often, I fail. In my wildest dream, I’m able to paint the masterpiece that finally allows people to understand the years and tears. Currently, I am trying for a picture-perfect life. I’m taking steps to overcome my highest anxieties by listening to doctors, pushing through compulsions, getting out of bed, and challenging cognitive distortions. I am living the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life. I know that the steps to overcome Chronic regional pain syndrome don’t necessarily mean a pain-free life. I can’t change the existence of the problem itself, but I can change the way I deal with the problem. In my wildest dream I can accept myself and whatever I accomplish, even if it is not perfect. I can learn to accept that CRPS and everything it comes with will always be a part of my life, my disappointments, and my triumphs.

The pain translates to today. Every day, I make decisions based on that gymnastics meet nine years ago and the hundreds of hours of doctor’s appointments and clinic visits throughout the years. I wonder who I’d be if I skipped gymnastics that night. If Boston is simply a city with smart colleges, not just medical treatments. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to understand a life without my pain. What I do understand though is that being healed won’t change me. I know how it has influenced me, but I doubt I will ever stop learning either. For that reason, my life is a life with CRPS, with and without pain. I am who I am because of these experiences and the circumstances I have yet to face.

Fighting the Undertow Daniel Cook, university

Have you ever been caught in an undertow? Imagine swimming through waves—feeling the cool rush send a shock through your body—when a force begins pulling you away from the shore. You try swimming back to the beach but feel the current’s grip dragging you farther out to sea. After a minute, your arms and legs begin hurting. You start choking on water as you gasp for air. You attempt to yell for help only to be choked on by more water. Your mind is in a state of panic as your body begins shutting down. Suddenly, you remember what your parents told you, “Swim parallel to the shore.” You turn and start swimming again. Every muscle screams in agony, but you keep fighting. Finally, after what seems like an eternity, the force stops. Relief floods your mind. You slowly swim to the shore and crawl onto the sand. Falling flat on your back, you breathe peace back into your soul.

Life is full of undertows. Today we are faced with so much political and social injustice that many people feel as if they are caught in an undertow of emotions. I was caught in this particular undertow for a while. As a gay male living in the Deep South, I have struggled with finding my place in society. I have often asked myself questions such as “Who do I want to become?,” “What do I stand for?,” and “How can I help others?.” With the start of the new year, I have decided it is time to face these questions.

I am an activist at heart. It is my purpose. With the help of the YES! article “How to Prepare for 2020” and Alicia Garza, I was able to pinpoint objectives that I should focus on instead of aimlessly treading through life, being swept further away from my goals. I want to be able to hold my husband’s hand in public without eyes glaring in our direction. I want to have a place of worship that accepts me. I want to be able to enroll my children in school without the fear of them being bullied for having gay parents. I want a job without having the fear of being dismissed

because of my sexuality. I want to be seen as an equal instead of as an “other.” And most of all, I want to live in a world where I don’t have to fear being murdered like Matthew Shepard.

In order to achieve all of this for myself and people like me, I have to be more active. The article helped me outline steps I can take within the next year to help myself and others in the LGBTQ+ community. These steps include getting involved with a local LGBTQ+ activist organization, getting trained in how to provide safe spaces for people to freely discuss issues affecting them, and reading more literature and research on LGBTQ+ issues while making these resources more available to the public. If I can conquer these steps, I will have made 2020 worth wild.

2020 is the year I have decided I will no longer be a victim of the undertow. By focusing on my goals and following steps to achieve them, I will have the knowledge and ability to get out of the treacherous current of fear and anxiety about being who I am. I will no longer drown in the self-doubt accompanied by not knowing what I stand for. I will glide through the waters of hate and social injustice and hopefully arrive one day on the shores of equality, love, and acceptance.

*“Can I Dream?”**Maitreya Motel, grade 8*

How do you dream in a nightmare? How do you solve a puzzle when half of the pieces have been stolen? I remember being barely twelve years old when the shooting happened at Parkland. My dad held onto me like I would vanish any second, sobbing while we listened to the news.

When you're 12 years old, you've thought about death a lot in theory, but rarely in a way that's grounded in reality. You normally aren't considering, “Oh, it could happen like this. Someone could have a gun and you could be in the bathroom at the wrong time. Someone could have a gun and your sixth-grade classmates could sneeze at the wrong moment. Someone could have a gun and shoot you. And you won't be able to say goodbye to your mom and dad or tell them how much you love them. When's recess?”

I guess kids used to dream about being movie stars and star football players and millionaires. Now, I look around and we're praying to make it through high school. And beyond that? Will the planet be liveable? Will our kids be okay? We want answers and guarantees. Are there any guarantees anymore? Our dreams are survival based. How much can you dream before waking up again?

But I do have a dream.

My dream is to have the luxury of dreaming. My dream is to live in a world where what matters most is that new movie or first date. My dream is for us to be kids again instead of feeling like the future is on our shoulders. If I lived in this world, I could breathe again. Maybe, just this once, I'd get to sleep.