



Indiana Writers Center “What Was and Will Be” Prompts for Adults

Kurt Vonnegut said, “What is the purpose of life? ... To be the eyes, and ears, and conscience of the creator of the universe; you fool.” Be the eyes, ears, and conscience of the creator of the universe (whatever/whomever you believe the creator is) by writing about an incident pertaining to the virus that you feel it’s important for people to know.

How has your perception of time changed over the months of being shut in? How have the markers by which you usually track time changed? Do you find that you have more or less time of your own? How does this affect how you feel about your life? When the virus is over, do you think you will manage time differently than you did before the virus changed your day-to-day life?

Consider all that’s happened surrounding the Covid-19 virus, so far. Imagine what the world will be like when (sooner or later) the crisis is over. Free-write a letter to someone not born yet—a grandchild, health care worker, essential care worker—anyone, really. Tell them what this time was like, what you learned, what you think should be remembered. Share your hope for what the world will be like when (sooner or later) the crisis is over. Be as specific as you can be

Write about how someone close to you is weathering the quarantine. It might be someone with you in quarantine or someone who’s quarantining elsewhere. How do they spend their time? What has surprised you about them? Have you learned anything new about them? What worries you about them? Has their behavior changed during this time? If so, how? What do you think they miss most? What makes you think this? What do you think they might like about being in quarantine? Do you think they’ll be different in some way when it’s over? If so, how?

Write about what you find yourself doing (or not doing) during this time that gives you that “(slightly-guilty) secret glee.” Anything, no matter how small, that surprises, satisfies or gives you pleasure. Describe it in detail first, then reflect. How do you think this might affect the way you live your life when this time is over? What, if anything, have you learned from it?

What do you miss doing? What might you be doing (or about to do) that you can’t do because of the quarantine? Write what you miss about it and/or write it as if you *are* doing it. If it’s something you always do at this time of the year, feel free to include the history of doing this

thing. If it's something you've never done before, feel free to write about what you imagined/hoped it would be. It might be an ordinary thing or something special.

Consider a holiday or annual celebration (a birthday, anniversary, Labor Day). Write about what it means to you, how you usually spend the day, how you plan to spend it this year, and how you think this annual celebration might be different in the future.

The last day of school, the beginning of summer mark a shift in day-to-day life for almost everyone. If you have kids, write about their last day of school—how it was different from last days in the past and how your day-to-day life will be affected by Covid-19 as we shift as we move into summer. If you're not affected by the end of school, think about your own experiences as a child (or perhaps as a teacher) and write about something that kids today can't do because of Covid-19 and might never be able to do again. Or write about how summer plans have changed because of the virus.

Write about how the first day of school has been affected by concerns about the virus and how it will be different from the way it usually is. Write about how the first day of school was for you as a young person and how it will be different for your children. If you're a teacher, write about the first day from your point of view—what are your concerns, how will it be and feel different from first days in the past? What are your general concerns about the effect of the corona virus on American education?

What is your gut reaction to the reopening of schools, businesses, churches and other places where people gather? Write to explore *why* this is your instinctive reaction and what the repercussions of opening might be if you are right (or wrong.) Balance your feelings with ideas/logic/images. If it interests you, try freewriting a dialogue in which you argue with someone whose gut reaction is the opposite of yours.

There are so many ways of being engaged in addressing the problems our country faces, many of which have been highlighted and complicated by Covid19. Nobody can do everything, but how do you know what *you* can do? How can you know when you're choosing a response to the virus that is comfortable for you when you should consider taking what you know you can do outside your comfort zone and risk doing it in a new way? How might you do what you know you can do in a new way?

Write about something ordinary that you see every single day in quarantine. Has it changed in any way over this period of time? Have you changed in a way that makes you feel differently about it? Do others in quarantine with you notice, use, or comment on this thing? Will it still be there once quarantine is over? If not, what will you do with it?

Describe a meal you can't have in quarantine (for whatever reason), where you'd have it, and who you'd have it with. When did you last have it? With whom? If you had the chance, is there anything you'd change about that experience? Will you "do" the meal differently when it possible to have it again?

Write about something you think will disappear or change significantly as a result of the pandemic as if you are preserving it to be discovered by a writer doing research for a historical novel to be set any time before 2020. What would a writer need to know to be able to write a historically accurate scene set in that era? Better yet, write that scene.

Write about how you think the Covid-19 situation may have shaped, fueled, and/or intensified the Black Lives Matter protests and how you think the way in which the virus has highlighted this and so many other many problems in our culture might affect how we look at those problem and work to solve them.

Describe something you desperately wanted or wanted to do as a child or adolescent and how it felt not to be able to have or do it. Think about how this was like and unlike what you desperately want or want to do now—and can't.

So much of our response the virus has been angry, frustrated, fearful—and worse. But there are moments that seem so absurd that you just have to laugh. Some of the memes and parodies that have emerged have been hilariously on target. Even some of the most egregious stupidities and breaches of logic can seem (well, briefly) funny. Write about how your sense of humor has been challenged and enriched during this time, and why you think a sense of humor (not to mention irony) is an asset in the worst of times.

Rituals—or the tasks we reform repeatedly, not for what they accomplish but for what they mean to us—can mark time in our day, calm us, and/or help us prepare for challenges. Describe a personal ritual and describe it's benefits to you. It might be a ritual you've had for a long time or one that you developed during these past months. If it's a longtime ritual and the virus has affected how you perform it or made it impossible to perform, describe how the change or loss has affected you.

Write about what happened to someone you know who was physically affected by the virus by testing positive, being sick with it, or even dying. It might be someone who is an essential worker, facing the possibility of being exposed to the virus in their job. How did you find out about it? How were you able to help? What was most upsetting to you about it?

Write a letter to future historians, telling them what they need to know to fully understand what it was like to be alive during the 2020 Pandemic—not just generally, but from your personal point of view.

Day-in-the-Life. Choose a day, brainstorm all the details you can remember about that day, jotting them down. Put them in the correct sequence, make a list of the details that best capture the feeling of that particular day, and write the story of that day.

Since you asked, what I *really* want to write about today is _____. Write about that.

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