

When Life Gives You Lemons: COVID-19 Pandemic Journal

A Writing Activity for Middle School and High School Students

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Because of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic we are currently experiencing, life as we know it has temporarily changed. You may not realize it, but we are living through a historic event that will lead to curiosity and research years from now. There is uncertainty for those of us who have never witnessed such an occurrence. However, it often helps to write and share our experience, resulting in historical evidence. Journals and letters are one way to document history and share our unique perspective. Get ready to think, observe, and write. Your writing will benefit not only you, but also the museums and libraries that are currently seeking COVID-19 primary sources during this unprecedented time in our lives.

Your task: Using the prompts on page two, write a journal that includes entries over several days, or write a letter. The prompts will serve as a starting point. Write about your unique experience beyond what is listed here if possible. If you can, include photographs of your activities and daily life, or original drawings that represent this event.

Choose one of the following formats to present your experience:

- 1) **A Google Doc** that includes all journal entries or your letter. Add photos or drawings to document your experience.
- 2) **A digital portfolio such as Google Sites** that allows creativity and the option of building multiple pages. Try to include photos to add interest, and/or news articles for historical accuracy.
- 3) **A blog** on a blogging site such as **Kidblog.org** (a school subscription blog site that some students already use). Blogs are another way to create unique entries to share with classmates, family, friends, and teachers.
- 4) **A handwritten letter or journal to submit to the Gallatin History Museum's Community Memoir Project** for display in the museum. The museum prefers handwritten letters but is also accepting emailed submissions. Submissions can include drawings and photos and should be dropped off at the box near the museum door in Bozeman or mailed to 317 W. Main St., Bozeman, 59715. Email submissions to media@gallatinhistorymuseum.org. If you do not live in Southwest Montana, consider finding a local history museum in your area to see if they would be interested in sharing your journal.

5) A submission for the “Documenting COVID-19 in Missoula County” project sponsored by the University of Montana Mansfield Library at www.lib.umt.edu/asc/covid-project/.

Please visit the website for specific information and preferred formats.

Begin your letter or each journal entry with the date (month, day, and year) and consider the following questions as you write. Think of your audience as the people who may read this years from now but didn’t experience this pandemic. You’re giving them a glimpse into your daily life to help them understand this unique event.

Prompts for Consideration

1. What is your daily routine? How much time do you spend doing school work and how much time is spent doing other activities like physical exercise, helping with chores at home, etc.? What hobbies or activities have you done?
2. What challenges (problems) do you have learning from home? What do you NOT like?
3. What success have you or your parents had with distance learning? What do you like? What is going well?
4. What did you previously take for granted that you now miss?
5. How are you continuing to communicate with friends and family members outside of your home? What are their concerns and experiences? If you don’t know, ask them.
6. Do you have any concerns or fears?
7. Does your routine include watching the news about the pandemic? What facts have you learned from the news? How quickly does the information change?
8. What questions do you have about the current situation or the immediate future?
9. In what ways are you able to help others while staying at home?
10. How do you or others try to stay positive? Attempt to share one example each time you write.
11. What lessons can we learn from our current situation? What good may come from it?

Teacher and Parent Tips

- All of these writing activities can be adapted to meet your students’ or children’s needs. Encourage honest, heart-felt writing and creativity. It’s important that students have a chance to express their experience.
- Keep in mind that many students are using computers and technology all day. A handwritten journal or letter might be a nice break!
- Participate in writing a journal or letter yourself. Going through the same process is inspirational for them and serves as an opportunity to offer suggestions. Also, it’s great for students to have an example as a model for their own writing. **The Gallatin Historical Museum seeks writing from all ages.**
- If the suggested technology is unfamiliar or overwhelming to you, use the handwritten option or reach out to teachers and others who use the sites. People are always willing to help, and students often teach **us** how to use technology!

- If students struggle with the journal format or content, encourage them to read other famous memoirs like *The Diary of Anne Frank* or *Sky* by Hanneke Ippisch.
- Also consider the following PBS Newshour Student Reporting Labs activity “Making Sense of Coronavirus Through Storytelling and Media Making” at this link:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1f0wjpwSLigOPf1Mv8YJc_YFtYUB4nsd12chXO8Y46Ec/edit