

Prompt for the 2024 Promising Young Writers contest

*While we might feel small, separate, and all alone,
Our people have never been more closely tethered.
The question isn't if we will weather this unknown,
But how we will weather this unknown together.*

*So on this meaningful morn, we mourn and we mend.
Like light, we can't be broken, even when we bend.*

The Miracle of Morning - Amanda Gorman¹

These lines, taken from an Amanda Gorman poem, speak to our experiences of connection and disconnection during the pandemic. Through her writing, she names different ways that we weathered the physical and emotional toll of sheltering in place, found ways to connect with others, and find comfort in nature. Gorman names feeling isolated yet also tethered (connected) and the need for grieving and mending. The teen years are already a time of changing connections, as relationships with others shift. Over the past several years, we have all lived through an incredibly unique time in which the ways that we connected to others changed drastically. This combination puts you, as a young writer, in circumstances that make connecting to, reconnecting to, and/or disconnecting from those around you particularly meaningful.

For the 2023–2024 Promising Young Writers prompt, we would like to invite you to think about moments of connection. Consider connections to our past and future selves, our loved ones, our animals and plants, our land and water, and/or our environment and world.

Possible questions that you might explore are provided below. You are not expected to respond to all (or any) of these questions. Rather, they may inspire you and your writing. Additionally, your response can be in whatever style or genre of writing you prefer — expository, persuasive, narrative, descriptive, or creative.

We invite you to think about your connections.

- How have your connections helped you cope, grow, or thrive in times of change?
- How does maintaining your social/familial connections look and feel?
- What do you know about yourself and how you relate to others through these experiences of connection?
- How do your connections influence who you are?

¹ Gorman, A. (2021). *Call us what we carry: poems*. Penguin.

- How do you see the impact of connections on your communities or environments?
- What do connections feel, sound, taste, smell, or look like?

We also invite you to consider moments of disconnection.

- In what ways have you experienced disconnection, and how did you respond?
- What did you learn about yourself and how you relate to others?
- Were there ways in which disconnection led to personal growth, new connections, or reconnection in new ways?
- What does disconnection feel, sound, taste, smell, or look like?

And, lastly, we invite you to explore moments of reconnection.

- How and why have you sought to reconnect with others?
- How has your identity and understanding of yourself changed or strengthened with these experiences?
- What relationships have you lost and found again that have been important to you?
- What does reconnection feel, sound, taste, smell, or look like?

Your submissions need to meet the following guidelines:

- Up to 10 pages
- Double-spaced
- 1-inch margins
- 11-point font or larger in a legible font (such as Arial, Times New Roman, Calibri, or Verdana)

Additionally, please:

- Include page numbers in the upper right-hand corner of each page.
- Add your name in the upper left-hand corner of each page.
- Do **not** include the name of your school.