



Social Justice Writing Competition: South African Schools' Debating Board and the Centre for Sexualities, Aids and Gender

Dear schools and educators

The South African Schools Debating Board (SASDB), in partnership with the Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender (CSA&G) at the University of Pretoria, is excited to announce the launch of the Social Justice Writing Competition for 2022. This competition is an opportunity for high school learners to become published authors and add their voices to important issues in our country and world. The competition is designed to give learners full exposure to the writing and publishing process.

High school learners in South Africa are invited to submit a written entry of no longer than **1000** words on the theme **“The Covid-19 pandemic: Viruses, Villains, Victims and Victors”**. This entry can be an opinion piece, a reflective essay, a short story or a poem.

The competition is free of charge. Entries will be accepted from 9 February 2022 to **21 March 2022**. Guidelines for submission are explained below.

The annual writing competition has evolved into one of our cornerstone projects. In 2019, we ran the first edition of the competition, where we invited schools in Gauteng to attend a social justice workshop conducted by the CSA&G. Participants were then asked to write a short story based on selected social justice topics, and the top entries were selected for a book publication through the University of Pretoria. Last year we expanded the competition nationally and published the second edition *Social Justice Stories: No Longer Silent on GBV*. The top 32 entries from across South Africa were selected for a book publication through the University of Pretoria. The book was such a phenomenal success that we partnered with Global Citizen South Africa, to distribute the final copies of the book. If you would like to sample the final publication, please follow the link below.



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<https://www.csagup.org/download/social-justice-stories-no-longer-silent-on-gbv/>

How the competition works

The Writing Competition is conducted in three phases. The first phase is a preparatory workshop where interested participants are invited to attend workshops to help them understand and explore the topic. Please note that participation in the workshop is strongly recommended but is not a pre-requisite for submitting an entry. In the second stage, participants are invited to submit an entry on the theme, and the top 30 entries are selected for publication. In the final phase, the winning participants are taken through workshops and consultations to edit and polish their entries before publication.

The preparatory workshops

In this stage, the participants will attend an online workshop presented by the CSA&G and the SASDB. The first workshop focuses on unpacking the Covid-19 pandemic and issues that have arisen from the pandemic. The second workshop focuses on aiding learners with writing narrative and argumentative essays. Both workshops will be online. It is not compulsory to attend the workshops; however, we highly encourage all participants to attend.

Details for the workshops:

Workshop 1

Date: 23 February 2022

Time: 16:00-18:00

Platform: Zoom



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Workshop 2

Date: 25 February 2022

Time- 16:00-18:00

Platform: Zoom

To register for the workshop, please complete the form below. You may register individually or on behalf of a school:

<https://forms.gle/qmK7nWMh4xbdWKH89>

Submission of entry

The due date for entries is **21 March 2022 at 23:59**. No late submissions will be considered. The purpose of the workshops is to assist participants with their entries; however, participants are welcome to submit their entries before the workshops. To submit an entry for the competition, please use the link below: <https://forms.gle/65Ben1dR3yHY3Y338>

Competition Rules

1. The competition is open to all Grade 8-12 learners attending an educational institution in South Africa.
2. Participants must submit a written entry of no longer than 1000 words. This entry can be an opinion piece, a reflective essay, a short story or a poem on the theme “The Covid-19 Pandemic: Viruses, Villains, Victims and Victors”.
3. Entries over a 1000 words will not be considered for publication.
4. Participants can enter more than one entry and a maximum of three entries.
5. Participants can submit entries in any of the 11 official languages of South Africa.
6. Participants are also allowed to combine English and another South African official language.
7. This year, participants are not allowed to submit an entry in groups.



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Possible themes to write on

Below is a list of possible themes related to the Covid-19 pandemic that students can write on. *Please note that you are not restricted to these themes; these are just guidelines to help you start thinking about what topics you can cover.*

Background

We like to think of viruses as simply a germ. But who gets a virus can depend on their socio-economic position, the kinds of risks they are exposed to, and their resources? And health system inequalities can be exposed when people come forward for treatment. We respond to people with viruses in different ways; we often like to blame or judge them. Or we accuse them of caring only for themselves. Now that vaccines are available, we are divided into those who have and those who do not. Some people are scared of a vaccine; some believe and spread misinformation. Rich countries may hold onto vaccines, worried about the next wave. Big Pharma has made a lot of money out of the vaccines; where should those profits go? Education is being challenged by Covid: what does it mean to be a learner, a student, and what inequalities emerge in the online teaching space? What is “teaching” if a lot of it is online? What if I am a loner who likes to work from home, at my own pace? What does it mean to have a sense of community? In some ways, Covid has brought us together, but it has also shown society’s fault lines, and the cracks sometimes show. Some reports suggest that gender-based violence increased during Covid and abused women were often stuck with their abusers during lockdowns. So Covid has changed the way the world works and has forced every society to ask itself some important questions. These are questions about the social justice impact of a virus that has produced villains, victims and victors.



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What are some social justice issues raised by Covid, which you can write about?

Risks

- Is everyone equally susceptible to Covid, or is inequality a driving factor?
- Are the risks personal or part of an unequal society “systems and structures”?

Health care

- Are the “Covid-sick” treated the same across society?
- What has the pandemic exposed about inequalities and inequities in our health system?
- Is our health system accountable and responsive to society?
- Some health services, for example, TB programmes, suffered due to the pandemic: what was the impact of the pandemic on those living with HIV/AIDS and TB?

Protection

- How do we protect our people from Covid?
- Does the protection of our people come at the expense of our neighbours?
- When we think of “our” people, does this include foreigners, refugees, minorities?

Vaccines

- Should pharmaceutical companies profit off a global emergency?
- What happens when people refuse to take the vaccine?
- Should employers and educators be allowed to insist their staff and students vaccinate?
- Do my individual rights not to vaccinate outweigh the rights of broader society to protect the majority?
- What is the role of shame and stigma in Covid?

Rethinking meaning

- What does living with Covid (and long Covid) mean?
- What does dying with/of Covid mean?
- What does losing loved ones to Covid mean?

The virus and gender:



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- Rates of gender-based violence rose during the lockdown; what could have contributed to this?
- Was the burden of the pandemic felt equally by all genders (and queer people in general)?

The new normal

- How do we think about work, education and leisure in a time of Covid?
- How have you experienced the transition to the online world?
- What inequalities exist with this new online world?
- What kind of society do we want to create with/after Covid?
- Should we continue encouraging people to work and study from home after the pandemic?
- Is there ever going to be an “after”?

Personal experience

- How have you been impacted by the pandemic?
- What was your experience of the shift to online education and engagement?