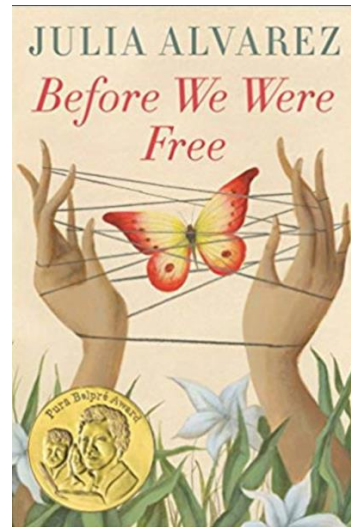


Before We Were Free

Writing Prompts



ISBN-13	978-0399555497
ISBN-10	0399555498
Author	Julia Alvarez
Publisher	Ember
Copyright	2002
Lexile	890L
Genre	Historical fiction
Synopsis	Anita de la Torre celebrates her twelfth birthday during a turbulent time in the Dominican Republic. Trujillo's dictatorship and the secret police terrorize family members and friends. Through her diary, Anita recounts her daily life and the struggles of those who fight for freedom.
Themes	Civil Rights; Resilience; Latino American.

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 1



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 6

"Where's Papi?" Yo asks. She and I are the Oscars of our family, always asking questions. But I don't always get to ask mine when Yo is around.

A look passes from one adult to another as if they are playing musical chairs with their eyes, trying to decide who'll be the one stuck answering Yo's question. Finally, Papi speaks up. "He'll be waiting for you at the airport."

EXTEND

Write a short product based on today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to the writing prompt. Write a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words). Provide evidence from the text, and use as many details as possible.

- The García girls are permitted to bring one item with them on their move to the United States. How might a person decide on their one item? What might a person consider when making their choice? What would you bring if you were in their place?

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 2



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 18

“Anita, por favor,” Mami pleads, collapsing in a hall chair. She leans forward and whispers in my ear, “Please, please, you must stop asking questions.”

“But why?” I whisper back. I can smell her shampoo, which smells like coconuts in her hair.

“Because I don’t have any answers,” she replies.

Write a short product based on today’s prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to the writing prompt. Write a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words).
Provide evidence from the text, and use as many details as possible.

- Anita’s family is hesitant to tell her what is happening with her family and the SIM agents. What are the pros and cons of not telling Anita what is going on? Do you think they should be completely honest with Anita? Why or why not?

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 3



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 37

Papi always says that we need a government that will give these children a chance, like the one the United States has. "Education is the key! Who knows if one of those little tigueros in the mercado isn't an Einstein or Michelangelo or maybe even a Cervantes!" Mami hushes him with her usual "No flies fly into a closed mouth, Mundo" But her face is fierce with pride, as if Papi is a hero for saying what he thinks.

Write a short product based on today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to the writing prompt. Write a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words). Provide evidence from the text, and use as many details as possible.

- Anita is faced with the dilemma of telling the truth or lying about why she has missed school. Write a paragraph about the responsibility to be safe and the responsibility to be honest, and how you would choose between the two when they conflict.

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 4



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 48

We are free! I want to cry out. But thinking about how the SIM raided our property, how Tío Toni had to disappear, how I have to erase everything in my diary, I know that Oscar is telling the truth. We're not free—we're trapped—the Garcías got away just in time! I feel the same panic as when the SIM came storming through our house.

Write a short product based on today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to the writing prompt. Write a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words). Provide evidence from the text, and use as many details as possible.

- What are the ethical ramifications of censorship? Who might be hurt by censorship?

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 5



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 58

Mami hushes them both with her eyes. We have to be careful of being overheard by someone on the SIM secret payroll. Lorena was recently caught 'cleaning' the desk drawers in Papi's study.

Papi and Tío Toni are so brave. It makes me want to be like Joan of Arc, a courageous girl who heard heavenly voices. But unfortunately, unlike Saint Joan, I've yet to hear a voice tell me what I can do to help my suffering country.

Write a short product based on today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to the writing prompt. Write a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words). Provide evidence from the text, and use as many details as possible.

- What are cultural, societal, or familial events that make you feel that you are becoming a young adult? What are pros and cons to these coming of age events? Reflect on age-based events such as a quinceañera or bar mitzvah, and familial events such as learning to drive or getting a first job.

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 6



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 75

I admit I feel mean participating in this scheme—but I also understand that our lives are in danger. A tip from Lorena could wipe us out. It's so unfair to live in a country where you have to do stuff you feel bad about in order to save your life. It's like Papi and Tío Toni planning to assassinate Mr. Smith when they know that murder is wrong. But what if your leader is evil and rapes young girls and kills loads of innocent people and makes your country a place where not even butterflies are safe? I feel sick to my stomach all over again just thinking about all this.

Write a short product based on today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to the writing prompt. Write a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words). Provide evidence from the text, and use as many details as possible.

- Anita and Lucinda both face a situation that causes them to make choices they think are right for their health and wellbeing. Reflect on ways you can show yourself respect and kindness, and ways you evaluate if something is healthy for you.

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 7



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 80

“One day...in a time not too far in the future...,” Papi begins, as if he’s telling me a bedtime story, “You’re going to look back on all this and think, I really was a strong and brave girl.”

I shake my head. I’m not so strong or brave, I want to say.

“Oh yes, you are. I know you are,” he insists, reading my thoughts. He tips my face up by the chin so I’m looking straight at him. I feel as if he’s hypnotizing me. “I want my children to be free, no matter what. Promise me you’ll spread your wings and fly.”

Write a short product based on today’s prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to the writing prompt. Write a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words). Provide evidence from the text, and use as many details as possible.

- How is Anita’s loss of speech related to the events occurring around her? Provide examples from the text that support a connection.

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 8



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 92–93

“It’s scary being the ones left, don’t you think?” Oscar is saying. I look down at the fists my hands have formed without my even telling them. Suddenly I’m so grateful to Oscar for admitting he’s scared too. Now I don’t have to feel as if I’m going crazy all by myself. “You know what Papi says?” Oscar asks. His voice is real quiet as if we’re in a secret place together. “You can’t be brave if you’re not scared.”

Write a short product based on today’s prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to the writing prompt. Write a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words). Provide evidence from the text, and use as many details as possible.

- Occasionally a day can shift from having everyday events to having personal life-changing events or events with a global impact. Reflect of moments, either modern or historical, that change a day from ordinary to extraordinary.
- Write a hypothesis of how you think Anita’s family will be changed after this life-changing day. How do you hypothesize the Dominican Republic will be changed?

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 9



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 101

I look over at Mami, hoping she'll say that everything's going to be all right. But her hand is shaking so badly that she can't even finger the beads on her rosary. Mami's scared, too! Oscar said you have to be scared to be brave. I just have to stay one step ahead of being scared. If it's just a small step, maybe I can do it.

Write a short product based on today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to the writing prompt. Write a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words). Provide evidence from the text, and use as many details as possible.

- How can fear be both paralyzing and a source for bravery?

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 10



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 128

Reading The Arabian Nights again has started me thinking...can stuff like this really happen? A girl who saves her life by telling a cruel sultan a bunch of stories? Let's say El Jefe had taken me away to his big bedroom like he wanted to do with Lucinda. Could I have told him some stories that would have changed his evil heart? Or are some people so awful that nothing can really get inside them and make a difference?

Write a short product based on today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to the writing prompt. Write a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words). Provide evidence from the text, and use as many details as possible.

- Anita and her mother have to adapt to a life in hiding. Find at least five ways they have to adapt.

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 11



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 148-149

At first, I just stand there, ashamed, submitting to his search as if I've done something wrong. But when he slaps his big hand on my chest, I cry out, "I wasn't doing anything! This is a free country!" Actually, I'm not really sure this is true. Maybe this is a free country only for Americans? Maybe if a policeman happens by, my whole family will be deported home, where we'll all be killed by the dictator's son?

Write a short product based on today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Respond to the writing prompt. Write a minimum of two paragraphs (200 words). Provide evidence from the text, and use as many details as possible.

- Anita is told to be brave before receiving tragic news. What might provide Anita with courage and support?

Character-Based Literacy Program Writing Prompts

Before We Were Free, Day 12



Analyze the key paragraph.

Key Paragraph, p. 162

But now that Papi is dead, it doesn't seem so scary to die. Sometimes, I think it's scarier to be alive, especially when you feel that you'll never be as happy and carefree as when you were a little kid. But I keep remembering Chucha's dream. She saw us sprouting wings, flying up and away. It has to mean more than our coming to the United States. After all, as Chucha herself would say, what good is it to escape captivity only to be imprisoned in your own misery?

Write a short product based on today's prompt to connect to the unit theme.

Final Writing Product

Your final writing product will be a persuasive essay in response to the following question:

What does it mean to be free?

Provide a personal definition of freedom, two historical examples of freedom (one can be from *Before We Were Free*), and conclude with a modern example of people advocating for freedom.

Your essay should include at least 500 words.

The essay should be concise – avoid repetition and redundancy in statements. Use the following checklist to evaluate your work:

- The essay begins with a clear argument.
- The essay provides examples to clarify the reasoning.
- The essay includes good transition sentences and phrases.
- The essay thoughtfully presents counterarguments.
- There is a topic sentence in each paragraph.
- There is a logical progression from one paragraph to the next.
- The essay ends with a strong conclusion.

Create a timeline to organize your writing schedule.

- Add dates in the right-side column.
- Add lines to the schedule, as needed.

What	When
Create a thesis statement.	
Collect and organize ideas and facts.	
Complete an introduction paragraph.	
Complete the body paragraphs.	
Complete the conclusion paragraph.	
Read through and refine.	
Submit first draft.	
Revise based on feedback.	
Submit final draft.	