

“Letters to the Future and Reflections on the Past,”

An International Affairs and Cultural Interests Program in a Box for International Women’s Day, March 8, 2014: *“Inspiring Change”*



Program Summary

AAUW NYS members from around the state will write letters and cards to girls and young women about their life experiences and knowledge in celebration of International Women’s Day.

Objectives

- To celebrate the communal spirit of International Women’s Day by making connections in our communities and between generations.
- To share life experiences, wisdom, and history with young people so they can learn, understand, and connect with the history and experiences of women in their communities.
- To observe International Women’s Day and Women’s History Month by celebrating the women in our branches, listen to their stories, and learn from one another.
- To bring our branch members closer together with one another.
- To create a written record of our members’ life experiences and history.

Steps

1. Find girls or young women for your members to write to

- a. To find a group, try contacting schools, Girl Scout troops, houses of worship, community centers, other civic groups, or college and university clubs (some ideas are listed in the Resources section). Younger relatives or members may also be good targets.
- b. Collect names, ages, and contact information (or ask if the organization will hand out the letters directly).
 - i. Please bear in mind that some groups may not be able to give out personal information due to privacy policies and regulations, if the group cannot give you a first name, consider leaving space for the teacher or leader to fill in later or use a general salutation.
 - ii. Since this program is meant to celebrate and encourage inter-generational connections, consider asking if your target group can find mother-daughter pairings for your members to write to so you can have three generations communicating!

2. Plan the event, decide where and how to hold your writing session

- a. Will it be part of a regular branch meeting? Could it be part of another event like an International Women's Day potluck dinner, a "Movie Night," or a "Game Night"? Or, do you want it to be a stand-alone program? Would your members enjoy getting together for a chat and some letter writing over coffee or tea?
- b. You will probably need to budget at least an hour to two hours for discussion and writing, depending on the size of your group and how talkative you tend to be.
- c. This is a program observing International Women's Day, but it can be held anytime. It fits well with the themes of Women's History Month throughout March and other observances throughout the year.
- d. If necessary, be sure to reserve an event space with plenty of desks or tables. ([AAUW suggestions for meeting venues](#))
- e. Don't forget to get the word out to your members!

3. Collect the necessary materials as outlined in the Resources section below

4. Time to hold the event!

- a. Decide how to distribute recipients' names. Members could choose names randomly, select a recipient they have some connection with, or if there is a mix of ages, participants could select by the age they are most excited about writing to.
- b. Remind writers to try to keep their readers ages and general reading levels while they write.
- c. Before putting pen to paper, use the attached writing prompts to start conversations among your members to help them get in reflective and creative frames of mind. Let the conversation flow for 20 minutes or until it seems inspiration has struck and most participants seem ready to write.
- d. Participants should write letters to the young women and girls sharing their life experiences, history, advice, etc. The writing prompts are provided to give members general ideas for writing and to get thoughts flowing. The letters don't have to be limited to answering the prompts.
- e. Make sure writers sign their names and give contact information if they would like to give their letter recipient the opportunity to write back.
- f. Invite members to read their letters to the group and further discuss their experiences.

5. Post event wrap-up

- a. With the writers' permission, make copies or digital scans of the letters for your branch archives if possible. Also, if you're able, please email, mail, or share copies with Elise Russo or Jenn Mayfield for the AAUW NYS state archives and International Affairs and Cultural Interests program.
- b. Mail or distribute the letters.
- c. Consider submitting a press release or letter to the editor of your local media about the event, your members' amazing life stories, AAUW, and/or International Women's Day
- d. Complete the brief Program Evaluation in the Resources Section.

Resources

Places to Look for Letter Recipients

[Girl Scout Council Finder](#)

[Boys and Girls Club Finder](#)

[Directory of Public and Non-Public Schools and Administrators in New York State](#)

[SUNY Colleges, Universities, and Community Colleges](#)

[Key Clubs](#)

[YWCA Local Association Locator](#)

[YMCA: Find Your Y](#)

Meeting Space Suggestions

Materials

- **Materials Needed:** stationery or notecards, envelopes, pens, pencils, scrap paper, copies of the writing prompts (or some way to share them with participants like a projector), and stamps (if the letters aren't being delivered directly).
- **Suggestions for finding stationery or notecards**
 - Ask around to see if members have stationery they are willing to donate, especially the notecards distributed by AAUW.
 - Check for discounted stationery or cards at stores like Hallmark, Staples, Office Depot, etc. Or, ask retailers if they would be willing to donate materials. You may also be able to find inexpensive stationery sets online at sites like [Amazon](#), [PaperDirect](#), or [Vistaprint](#).

Contact Information for Elise Russo and Jenn Mayfield

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Facts about International Women's Day

History of International Women's Day

- Since 1977, the day is officially observed by the United Nations which declares a focus topic every year for policy makers, nonprofit organizations, and others to give special attention
- International Women's Day is much more than a UN declaration though, it was celebrated in countries around the world for more than 65 years before the UN adopted it. During the early 1900s, women across the globe were protesting for great equality, voting rights, better working conditions, and fairer pay. In various cities between 1908 and 1910, women held huge protests and would declare the day of the rally, "Women's Day."
- In the early years, Women's Day was a day for protests and marches, not celebration and reflection so there wasn't an officially declared date, it was held whenever women could plan for a rally. These were massive demonstrations, for example, in 1908, 15,000 women trooped the streets of New York City.
- The first official International Women's Day was called for in 1910 at the International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen. The conference attendees were women representing governments, unions, and other civic organizations from 17 countries. They unanimously approved the idea of a day for women around the world to unite in their struggle for equal rights and celebrate women and their progress. The following year, 1911, Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland were the first governments to officially designate International Women's Day as a holiday.

How International Women's Day is Celebrated Today

- Now, International Women's Day is celebrated every year on March 8 by countries around the world.
- Many countries officially recognize International Women's Day as an official holiday, in some it is even a public holiday and a half day or day off from work. But in China, Madagascar, and Nepal, only the women get time off.
- It is a day of celebration in many countries, somewhat similar to Mother's Day in the United States. People honor and celebrate the women in their lives. In many countries, it is customary to give cards, flowers and gifts to women like mothers, grandmothers, daughters, friends, and in some cases, employees and coworkers.
- In Italy, Russia, and Albania, men give yellow mimosas to the women in their lives. In France, women receive violets and lilies of the valley.
- Many Portuguese and Romanian women celebrate by having "women-only" dinner parties and inviting their family, friends, friends' daughters, etc. for a night of celebration and discussion.

For more information, please visit: www.internationalwomensday.com
[UN Events: International Women's Day](#)
[History of International Women's Day](#)

Writing Prompts

1. What is a historical event you lived through that stands out in your mind? Do you remember what were you doing or where you were? Why was it so important? What did you think about it at the time? Have your thoughts and feelings changed since then?
2. What is the best piece of advice anyone ever gave you? Why was it so helpful, what did it help you accomplish? Or, is there something you wish someone had told you when you were younger? What was it, why would it have been helpful?
3. This year's theme for International Women's Day is "Inspiring Change," what are some of the major changes in women and girls' lives that you've seen over the years? What are some further changes you want to inspire?
4. As women we all share certain feelings and emotions. When did you begin to feel that you were part of a much larger group and shared their joys, responsibilities, and challenges?
5. Who is a woman that has inspired you, either a public figure or someone from your life? What did she do? What kind of challenges did she face? What can a girl or young woman learn from her?
6. What is the biggest challenge you have faced in your life? How did you deal with it? Did you overcome it? Was there anything you learned from your struggle that might be useful insight for a young person to hear?
7. Part of "Inspiring Change" for women and girls' futures depends on knowing and understanding the past. Is there a story or something you want to share with a younger generation that you feel might help them better understand the way things were for women and girls in the past?
8. What are your wishes for "Inspiring Change?" Are there changes that you expected to see that haven't happened yet? Have there been any negative or regressive changes for women and girls? What are your wishes for the world your letter recipient and her peers are growing up in?
9. Keeping with the theme of change, have you ever moved someplace completely new and different? Are you an immigrant or first-generation American? Did you ever struggle to fit in or find your way in these new surroundings? What stories and advice would you share with a young girl or woman in similar shoes?
10. This exercise is a formalize version of what women have been doing for years, what sort of advice and stories did women like your mother, grandmother, etc. share with you when you were younger? Were they passed down from another generation before that? Do you know the story of how your family came to America? Do you have a favorite piece of family lore about your great-grandmother or a great-great aunt who was a legendary character?

Program Evaluation

Please take a few moments to let us know about your branch’s experience with the “Letters to the Future and Reflections on the Past” Program in a Box (PIAB). We want to know what you liked and didn’t like about the program and program materials and what your branch would like to see in future Programs in a Box.

You can either email Jenn and/or Elise with your responses or print this form out and mail it to one of the addresses in the resources section. You can also fill it out online: [PIAB Evaluation Online Response](#).

Thank you for your guidance and suggestions!

1) Generally, how enjoyable do you think this program was for participants? (1 being very unenjoyable and 5 being highly enjoyable)	1	2	3	4	5
2) Was turnout for this event lower than average (1), about the same as always (3), or higher than average (5)?	1	2	3	4	5
3) Please rate the degree of difficulty (1) or ease (5) of facilitating the program	1	2	3	4	5

4) What was your branch’s favorite aspect or feature of this program?

5) Was the written program material helpful? What could be changed to make material for future PIABs more helpful?

6) What are some themes or types of programs that you and your branch would like to see covered by PIABs?

7) Do you have any comments or suggestions for future International Affairs and Cultural Interests programs?