

Lesson Plan

In My Opinion

FOCUS

Writing a formal letter to an elected official on an environmental issue

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- How can I have my voice heard?
- How can I make a difference?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- research an environmental or ocean issue, take a position on the issue and write a formal letter to an elected official voicing their position either in support or opposition.

GRADE LEVEL

3-6 (Language Arts, Science, Computer)

MATERIALS

- Letter paper
- Envelopes
- Postage stamps
- Listings of local, state and national elected officials
- Listing of issues or topics for students to learn about

AUDIO/VISUAL MATERIALS

- Computer to conduct online research of issues or topics and to find government officials

TEACHING TIME

2 class periods of 20 minutes

SEATING ARRANGEMENT

Flexible

MAXIMUM NUMBER OF STUDENTS

Flexible

KEY WORDS

Senate, Congress, Elected, Official, Petition, Policy, Issue, County, State, City

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Writing letters to elected officials is one of the most effective ways Americans have of influencing lawmakers. The letters must be well written and individualized in order to have an impact.

PREPARATION

Print out and cut the cards in the three sets of cards attached to this document: (Coral reef organisms, scenario and extra organism cards).

LEARNING PROCEDURE

Introduction:

Lesson:

Activity A: Choosing a topic/issue

Separate the students into groups of four. Have them brainstorm/research environmental or ocean related topics that the class could select to write about in letters to elected officials. They may be local, state, or national issues.

The [Ocean Conservancy Action Alert Web site](#) highlights current national ocean issues. After the research session, have each group report their top 3 issues to the class.

Activity B: Research issue

Select an option: 1) the class votes on one



topic and everyone does the same research;
2) each small group picks one topic and those students do research on the same topic; and
3) each student picks a topic and does individual research

Students do research to learn about their issue: Some questions the students may research, include:

- Is it a general issue or is it a proposed law?
- Do I support or oppose the issue or proposal?
- What is some background information for this topic?
- What are my reasons for supporting or opposing?
- Who would be the best person/people to write to to state my opinion?
- How does the person I am writing to feel about it (support or oppose)?
- Am I agreeing with the person or asking the person to change their mind?

- If it is a local issue then write to the local elected officials.
- If it a state issue then write to the correct state official (representative or senator).
- If it is a national issue write to your congressional representative or senator.
- It may be better to write to them at their district office rather than in Washington, DC. They get much more mail in DC than at their District office.

- Who is sponsoring the proposal or law—they may be a good person to write.
- If it is going to be voted on, you may want to write your representative who will be voting so they know how you feel.
- If it is a general issue it is better to write to whoever represents your area.
- Example: It will not do much good to write to your Senator because you want the local government to buy a piece of property to make it into a city park.

Activity C: Draft Letter

Using the information gained through their research and the supplied sample letter, students write their formal letters.

Tips:

- Address one single topic in your letter—do not ramble!
- Be courteous and polite—never be abusive or rude, avoid being 'gushy' or overly flattering
- One page is best because it is easier to read
- Be factual, not emotional
- Check for spelling and grammar and write neatly
- Sign your letter with a return address included
- Learn who your representatives are at your State level and in Washington

These web sites will help:

[House of Representatives](#)
[United States Senate](#)

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER SUBJECTS

Computer Technology (research and keyboarding)

EVALUATION

1. Formative Evaluation: Evaluate the group work in progress and the related presentation.
2. Summative Evaluation: grading of the letters- spelling, grammar, neatness, etc.

RESOURCES

[Writing Letters to Congress](#)

NATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and



demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries,

databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This lesson was developed for NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries by staff at the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

CREDIT

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Sample Letter 1

John Doe
123 Park Street
Nowhere, PQ 12345
DATE (September 24, 2007) (never abbreviate)

Honorable Jane Smith
456 First Street
Podunk, RT 67892

Dear Honorable Senator Smith:

First Paragraph-

Thank the official for taking the time to read your letter.
Say who you are
Say why you are writing

Second Paragraph

Provide more detail on why you are supporting or opposing the issue/proposal.
Provide specific rather than general information about how the topic affects you and others.
If a certain bill/law is involved, state the correct name or number of the proposal whenever possible.

Third Paragraph

Request the action you want taken: a vote for or against a bill, or change in general policy.

Sincerely,

John Doe



Sample Letter 2

DATE (September 24, 2007) (never abbreviate)

Honorable Jane Smith
456 First Street
Podunk, RT 67892

Dear Honorable Senator Smith:

First Paragraph-

Thank the official for taking the time to read your letter.
Say who you are
Say why you are writing

Second Paragraph

Provide more detail on why you are supporting or opposing the issue/proposal.
Provide specific rather than general information about how the topic affects you and others.
If a certain bill/law is involved, state the correct name or number of the proposal whenever possible.

Third Paragraph

Request the action you want taken: a vote for or against a bill, or change in general policy.

Sincerely,

John Doe
123 Park Street
Nowhere, PQ 12345

