



Teacher-to-Teacher

Video Series
for Secondary Educators

TITLE: Letter Writing: An English Language Arts Lesson For Writing/Proofreading

PRIMARY SUBJECT AREAS: English Language Arts

GRADE LEVELS: 9 (adaptable to higher and lower grades)

OVERVIEW: We usually begin this letter-writing unit just before Thanksgiving. First, we write journal entries about letter writing (i.e. To whom did you last write? Why? What was the response? Etc.). Then, we read and analyze literature such as excerpts from the play *Love Letters* by A. R. Gurney or *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars* by Andrew Carroll or the short story "Appointment With Love" by S. I. Kishor. Both selections demonstrate the power of letters in shaping perception and in building strong relationships. In *Love Letters* a character discusses the importance of writing and letters:

"...I feel most alive when I'm holed up in some corner, writing things down. I pick up a pen, and almost immediately everything seems to take shape around me...This letter which I'm writing with my own hand, with my own pen, in my own penmanship, comes from me and no one else, and is a present of myself to you...you can tear me up and throw me out, or keep me, and read me today, tomorrow, any time you want until you die."

In order to aid students in selecting a letter recipient, we finish the literature examination with the poem "Summons" by Robert Francis

After a careful review of friendly letter format and common grammatical errors, students are asked to brainstorm and then to write a letter to someone who is deserving of thanks. Peer- and self-editing takes place. After the writing process is completed and a copy is made for the portfolio, envelopes are distributed, addressed, sealed, and mailed. Letters of thanks are usually received in time for Thanksgiving! * See suggestions for expanding this lesson in the Explorations and Extensions section.

APPROXIMATE DURATION: Approx. 6 fifty-minute class periods

LOUISIANA CONTENT STANDARDS:

<http://www/DOE/assessment/standards/ENGLISH.pdf>

Standard Two: Students write competently for a variety of purposes and audiences.

ELA-2-H4 Using narration, description, exposition, and persuasion to develop various modes of writing (e.g., notes, stories, poems, letters, essays, editorials, critical analyses, logs; (1,4)

ELA-2-H6 Writing as a response to texts and life experiences (e.g., technical writing, resumes. (1,2,4,5)

Standard Three: Students communicate using standard English grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and handwriting.

ELA-3-H2 Using the grammatical and mechanical conventions of standard English; (1,4,5)

**GLEs Addressed:
Grade 9**

19. Develop paragraphs and complex, multi-paragraph compositions using all modes of writing (description, narration, exposition, and persuasion) emphasizing exposition and persuasion (ELA-2-H4)
21. Write for various purposes, including:
 - formal and business letters, such as letters of complaint and requests for information
 - letters to the editor
 - job applications
 - text-supported interpretations that connect life experiences to works of literature (ELA-2-H6)
22. Apply standard rules of sentence formation, avoiding common errors, such as:
 - fragments
 - run-on sentences
 - syntax problems (ELA-3-H2)
23. Apply standard rules of usage, including:
 - making subjects and verbs agree
 - using verbs in appropriate tenses
 - making pronouns agree with antecedents
 - using pronouns appropriately in nominative, objective, and possessive cases
 - using adjectives in comparative and superlative degrees and adverbs correctly
 - avoiding double negatives
 - using all parts of speech appropriately (ELA-3-H2)
24. Apply standard rules of mechanics, including:
 - using commas to set off appositives or parenthetical phrases
 - using quotation marks to set off titles of short works
 - using colons preceding a list and after a salutation in a business letter
 - using standard capitalization for names of political and ethnic groups, religions, and continents (ELA-3-H2)

TECHNOLOGY STRATEGIES:

<http://www.louisianaschools.net/DOE/LCET/curric/k12stand.pdf>

Technology Communication Tools (*Communication Foundation Skill*)

Students use telecommunications to collaborate, publish, and interact with peers, experts and other audiences.

Technology Productivity Tools (*Resource Access and Utilization Foundation Skill*)

Students use technology tools to enhance learning, increase productivity, and promote creativity.

Technology Research Tools (*Linking and Generating Knowledge Foundation Skill*)

Students use appropriate technology to locate, evaluate, and collect information from a variety of sources. Students use technology tools to process data and report results. Students evaluate and select new information resources and technological innovations based on the appropriateness to specific tasks.

Social, Ethical, and Human Issues (*Citizenship Foundation Skill*)

Students understand the ethical, cultural, and societal issues related to technology. Students practice responsible use of technology systems, information, and software. Students develop positive attitudes toward technology uses that support lifelong learning, collaboration, personal pursuits, and productivity.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

Civics: Citizenship and Government, History: Time, Continuity, and Change

OBJECTIVES:

1. The learner will read, analyze, and respond to world literature.
2. The learner will demonstrate critical thinking, investigation, comprehension, and analysis skills.
3. The learner will write letters for specific purposes. (e.g., letter of thanks, letter to editor).
4. The learner will per-and self-edit writing for common usage errors.
5. The learner will combine, expand, and revise sentences for variety, clarity, and emphasis. (e.g., parallelism).

MATERIALS:

- ◆ Excerpts from the play Love Letters by A.R. Gurney
- ◆ "Appointment with Love", a short story by S.I. Kishor
- ◆ Griffin and Sabine by Nick Bantock
- ◆ Letters from Vietnam accessed via the Internet
- ◆ Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam, a videos documentary directed by Bill Couturie, 1988
- ◆ War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars, by Andrew Carroll

◆ Stationery (optional), Envelopes, Postage Stamps

TECHNOLOGY CONNECTION:

Hardware: VCR or DVD player, camcorder, videotapes, Internet access

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The students should be able to read, comprehend, and respond to literary text. They should have the ability to apply basic writing skills. A beginner's knowledge of technology will suffice.

LESSON PROCEDURES:

1. Write journal entries about letter writing (i.e., To whom did you last write? Why? What was the response? Etc.).
2. Read and analyze (oral and written) various literature.
3. Finish the literature examination with the poem "Summons" by Robert Francis to assist students in choosing letter recipient.
4. Students review friendly letter format and common usage errors.
5. Students brainstorm, utilizing various prewriting strategies, and then write a letter of thanks to someone they feel is deserving.
6. Student/peer editing takes place after the class takes part in teacher-led editing of sample student letters.
7. Original letters are mailed; copies are placed in student portfolios.

REPRODUCIBLE MATERIALS:

N/A

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES:

- ◆ Teacher observation is a major assessment component in this activity.
- ◆ Teacher can create rubrics to address specific components and/or goals. (i.e., expectations for notebook/writing entries, rubric for final letter, etc.).
- ◆ Culminating writing activity can be evaluated according to LEAP 21 criteria or unit/course-specific criteria.

ACCOMMODATIONS/MODIFICATIONS:

Literature can be read aloud to aid in comprehension. Teacher can assist with editing while whole class peer-or self-edits.

EXPLORATIONS AND EXTENSIONS: Students may write letters in response to "Fresh Voices" column in Parade magazine and/or local teen letter columnist in newspaper. Students may assemble class anthology. Students may write letters to prospective employers, editor of school newspaper, etc. Students may create a class video documentary modeled after Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam based on a topic of their own choosing.

RESOURCES: Louisiana Department of Education content Standards obtained @: <http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/asps/home.asp?I=CONTENT>

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