

Let's Mail Away!

Writing Letters

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Grade Level	2nd – 3rd Grade	**Time Frame**	6 class periods
		Duration	45 minute sessions

Essential Question

Why are letters important and what do different kinds of letters have in common?

Summary

Sometimes, students have an aversion to writing because they lack a sense of purpose. In this lesson, students learn that letters can be an important way to communicate and can be fun to write. First, students brainstorm what they already know about letters and then explore letters written by a variety of people. As students write and receive letters to and from their classmates, they discover the value of letter writing. Students finish the lesson by writing and sending letters to community members, including an option for the class to participate in a letter writing program for the military and first responders.

Snapshot

Engage

Using the instructional strategy "Tell Me Everything," students brainstorm as a class about their experiences with writing and receiving letters. Students watch a video or listen to a book reading, and then discuss the importance of letters with an elbow partner.

Explore

Students participate in a "friendly letter scavenger hunt" where they read and compare letters, looking for common elements among the letters.

Explain

Using information from the scavenger hunt and video/book, students help to create a class Anchor Chart showing the basic parts of a friendly letter.

Extend

Students write "secret buddy" letters to classmates and move on to writing letters to family and friends. The class may then participate in Operation Gratitude, a virtual program where volunteers write letters to military personnel and first responders.

Evaluate

Students are evaluated throughout the lesson as they learn and practice using the correct form for friendly letter writing.

Standards

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (Grade 2)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.2.5: Know and use various text features (e.g., captions, bold print, subheadings, glossaries, indexes, electronic menus, icons) to locate key facts or information in a text efficiently.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.5: With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.6: With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

Attachments

- Examples-of-Letters-Let-s-Mail-Away.docx
- Examples-of-Letters-Let-s-Mail-Away.pdf
- How-to-Write-a-Friendly-Letter-Let-s-Mail-Away.docx
- How-to-Write-a-Friendly-Letter-Let-s-Mail-Away.pdf
- Rubric-Let-s-Mail-Away.docx
- Rubric-Let-s-Mail-Away.pdf
- Thought-Question-Sheet-Let-s-Mail-Away.docx
- Thought-Question-Sheet-Let-s-Mail-Away.pdf

Materials

- Examples of Letters (attached; one set of copies per group)
- How to Write a Friendly Letter handout (attached, optional; one per student)
- Thought & Question Sheet (attached, optional; one per student pair)
- Rubric (attached)
- Paper and pencil
- Anchor Chart paper and markers
- Books or short videos about writing and receiving letters (suggestions and links below)

45 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note: Showing How and Why to Write Letters

Before beginning this lesson, you may want to spend some time looking for an appropriate video on YouTube that illustrates someone writing or receiving a letter. The purpose of the video should be to demonstrate the universal value of letter writing.

Plenty of instructional videos, such as Mrs. Genna's "How to Write a Friendly Letter For Kids", focus on the parts of the letter and **how** to write a letter. However, you may have to work a little harder to find videos that emphasize the **why** of letter writing. Check out Kid President's video on "How to Write a Letter to Santa" for an example of some struggles that people experience with letter writing.

Allow one class period for this section of the lesson.

Begin by introducing students to the Tell Me Everything instructional strategy. Invite students to think about letters they have written and received and then share their thoughts with the class.

First, ask students if they have ever received a letter from a friend or family member. Next, ask if they have ever written a letter to a friend or family member to thank them for a gift or wish them a happy birthday, to the community to complain about a problem or ask a question, or to Santa to share their holiday gift list.

Consider capturing some or all student responses on paper, or have students participate by using Mentimeter or iBrainstorm. *This portion of the lesson may be shortened if students don't have much experience with letter writing.*

After discussing students' letter writing and receiving experiences, direct their attention to the forms that letters may take. Show them a short video of individuals receiving or writing letters(such as one of those mentioned above) or read aloud a book about receiving or writing letters.

Teacher's Note: Book Recommendations

This activity is meant to help students understand why we write letters and to feel the excitement of receiving and writing letters. If you want to show students a variety of letters and don't have time to read an entire book, you could read a letter or two from a variety of books. At this point, focus not on the parts of a letter, but on the cultural and personal value of a letter. Consider also checking out YouTube for videos of well-known authors reading their books about letter writing.

Some suggested books are:

- *Can I Be Your Dog?* by Troy Cummings (persuasive letters)
- *Dear Dragon: A Pen Pal Tale* by Josh Funk (friendly letters)
- *Ten Thank-You Letters* by Daniel Kirk (thank-you letters)
- *Dear Dinosaur* by Chae Strathie (letters looking for information)
- *The Day the Crayons Quit* by Drew Daywalt (letters for explaining feelings)
- *Dear Teacher* by Amy Husband (excuse letters)
- *The Jolly Postman* by Allan Ahlberg (variety of letter types)
- *I Wanna Iguana* by Karen Kaufman Orloff (persuasive letters)
- *XO,OX: A Love Story* by Adam Rex (admiration and love letters)
- *It Came in the Mail* by Ben Clanton (friendly letters)

After the video and/or book reading, have students work with an Elbow Partner to discuss the importance of writing and receiving letters.

During the class discussion, create an Anchor Chart titled “Why People Write Letters” from students’ combined responses.

90 minutes

Explore

Allow two class periods for this section of the lesson.

Once students have an understanding of the importance and purpose of writing letters, they are ready to explore what letters have in common.

Teacher's Note: Scavenger Hunt Preparation

The activity below, a friendly letter scavenger hunt, invites students to look closely at various letters to determine what common elements they share.

Make copies of the attached **Examples of Letters** or use some of your own examples. You could also have students bring letters from home to put into the scavenger hunt pile.

Be sure to check any letters students bring from home to make sure that nothing personal or confidential is shared with other students.

During the first class period allotted to this section of the lesson, place students in groups of three or four. Distribute a set of example letters to each group. Have each student read one letter before passing it to another student in the group. When students have read all of the letters in each set, take a few minutes to let each group discuss any similarities they found in the letters.

When students have read and discussed the letters, ask each group to share out what they found. Create a second Anchor Chart titled “How to Write a Friendly Letter” as each group shares its findings. Make sure that all of the letter parts students identify are included on the chart.

Use the questions below to get the discussion started:

- How do most of the letters start?
- What is in the upper right-hand corner?
- Where is the information the writer wants to share with the reader?
- What is different about what the letters say?
- How do you know when the letter writer has finished what they want to say?
- Which of the letters are “formal” letters? What makes these letters different from the others?

For the second class period in this section of the lesson, bring the class back together so that students are seated individually. Give each student one letter from the packet of example letters. Review the letter parts that students have identified.

Instruct students to imagine they are on a “friendly letter scavenger hunt,” where they individually locate the essential parts in their assigned letters. As students locate the essential parts of the letter, have them mark each part with a sticky note. As they find the letter parts, add the correct vocabulary labels to each part on the class Anchor Chart.

Refer to the attached **How to Write a Friendly Letter** handout for an example of how your Anchor Chart might look, including all the vocabulary labels for a friendly letter. You may wish to make a copy of this handout for each group so they can compare their labeled letters with the example on the chart.

After students have discussed and identified the essential parts of the letter by circling or labeling them, show students more examples of appropriate greetings, headings, and closings—e.g., options for a more formal closing in a business letter.

45 minutes

Explain

Teacher's Note: Sample Letter Preparation

Before the class period begins, gather more examples of letters and/or books about writing letters. Diary entries or letters can be found in books or texts from ReadWorks.org, Epic! digital reading platform, myON, or other literacy websites. You also might have other letters you've collected over time that you'd prefer to use as examples for this exercise.

Possible Online Reading Resources

Epic! Book Options:

- The Secret Diary of a Wolf
- The Secret Diary of a Toad
- The Secret Diary of a Bear
- Marvin's Monster Diary
- Leah and LeShawn Build a Letter
- Letter Carriers

MyON Book Options:

- Sincerely, Katie
- I Can Write Letters and Emails
- You Can Write Great Letters and Emails
- Paula's Letter
- The Letter

Schedule one class period for this section of the lesson.

Using the two Anchor Charts developed earlier in the lesson—first "Why People Write Letters," then "How to Write a Friendly Letter"—assign students additional letters to read and have them check the class charts to see if the published letters have all of the necessary parts.

Students should analyze these letters or diary entries by identifying the parts of the letter and the purpose of the letter. Have students mark the parts of the letter with sticky notes or highlighter tape.

Introduce students to the Think-Pair-Share strategy, and have students use this strategy to discuss their findings. During the discussions, ask each pair of students to decide on one comment and one question they want to share with the class. Instruct student pairs to record their ideas on a dry erase board or on the attached **Thought & Question Sheet**.

During the whole-class discussion, write any additional notes on what students feel is important on the class Anchor Charts.

45 minutes

Extend

Teacher's Note: Assigning Secret Pairs

Randomly assign each student a secret buddy before the class begins. Pass out names to each student, reminding them that they should keep the names of their buddies secret.

Spend one class period on this section of the lesson.

After students have seen various examples of letters and have discussed the essential parts of a letter, assign them to write their own letters.

Instruct each student to write a letter to their “secret buddy” classmate. Encourage them to write positive, complimentary letters to their classmates, using “lifts and nudges.” Remind them to include all of the required parts of a letter, beginning with a salutation and ending with an appropriate closing.

Each student should address their “secret buddy” by name in the letter; however, they should conceal their own identity in the letter to preserve their anonymity. Collect the letters when students have completed them. Check to make sure that every student has a letter addressed to them.

Make accommodations for students who may not be present on the letter-writing day so that no one is left out when the letters are distributed. Either save the letters for a special occasion or pass them out at the beginning of the next day.

Take care to ensure that every student writes a letter and every student receives a letter. It is just as important for a student to write a letter as it is to receive one.

Once students have practiced writing letters to classmates, assign letters to family members, school staff, other teachers, and friends. Encourage students to write thank you and birthday letters to classmates, family, and friends. Look for opportunities throughout the school term to assign letters.

You also can encourage students to write to authors, to health care workers, to elected officials, or to other individuals in the community about issues relating to their common interests, school subjects, or hobbies.

Optional Project: Operation Gratitude

Writing letters gives a purpose for writing. There are many programs involving students where letter writing is needed and appreciated. One national program is Operation Gratitude, in which students write letters to military personnel and first responders.

The Operation Gratitude website, linked here, provides instructions for participating. If you assign your class to write to a group of Operation Gratitude recipients, you will collect all the letters and send them in one large envelope. Operation Gratitude volunteers sort and distribute the letters.

As an introduction to Operation Gratitude, tell students about the history of pen pals and the Student Letter Exchange, a program that began in 1936 when a teacher wanted to introduce his students to other cultures and languages.

You might also want to share the following YouTube video: "Operation Gratitude: Letters to Troops."

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=iyGLIjFP0nY

45 minutes

Evaluate

Although one class period has been allocated for this section, evaluation takes place throughout the entire lesson. See the attached **Rubric** if you wish to conduct a global assessment of the overall lesson.

To reinforce the value of written letters, you may want to take time to write a letter to each individual student, making a positive observation about their efforts on the letter writing lesson.

The **Engage** activities both capture student interest and serve as a formative assessment. You can determine students' prior knowledge and gauge what they are learning by comparing their mastery in the final letter-writing project. Initial student participation will give you a sense of their familiarity with both writing and receiving letters.

The **Explore** activities will give you insight into students' knowledge of the letter form.

The **Explain** section fosters critical thinking as students apply their understanding of letters and letter formatting through analysis. Students first evaluate their own thinking as they test and check additional letters with the class Anchor Chart. Students then conduct peer reviews as they share their understanding of the parts of a letter with a classmate. Evaluate their understanding and mastery as students participate in the class discussion and add information to the anchor chart.

During the **Extend** section, evaluate students' ability to write a letter to a buddy using friendly letter components. If students do not demonstrate mastery of the parts of a letter, take time to review the example letters to refresh their skills.

Teacher's Note: Differentiation in Evaluation Methods

As an option for further evaluation, consider using an Exit Ticket**.** Have students write or respond to the essential question: *Why are letters important and what do different kinds of letters have in common?*

Resources

- Hudson, D. (2018, June 17). *Purple Flowers on Paper* [Photo]. Unsplash. https://unsplash.com/photos/DR31squbFoA
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Anchor Charts. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/58
- K20 Center. (n.d.). iBrainstorm. Tech Tools. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/634
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Bell Ringers and Exit Tickets. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/125
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Elbow Partners. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/116
- K20 center. (n.d.). Padlet. Tech Tools. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/1077
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Mentimeter. Tech Tools. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/645
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Tell Me Everything. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/107
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Think-Pair-Share. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/139
- Operation Gratitude. (2011, March 4). *Operation Gratitude: Letters to Troops* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyGLIjFP0nY&feature=youtu.be
- Primary Madness with Mrs. Genna. (2020, March 21). *How to Write a Friendly Letter - For Kids* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFJEYx1fc_c&feature=emb_title
- SoulPancake. (2012, December 6). *How to Write a Letter to Santa with Nick Hornby | Kid President* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxKXaGfeXbs&feature=youtu.be