

## 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 writing materials- paper, envelopes, and stamps or a computer with a printer (paper, envelopes, stamps)

Internet connection to do research

Or

Listings of local, state and national elected officials

Listing of issues or topics for students to learn about

**Audio Visual Materials****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**

### **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 section highlights current national ocean issues-

[http://www.oceanconservancy.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ta\\_actionalerts](http://www.oceanconservancy.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ta_actionalerts)

After the research session, have each group report their top 3 issues to the class.

Activity B: Research issue

Select an option:

the class votes on 1 topic and everyone does the same research

each small group picks 1 topic and those students do research on the same topic

each student picks a topic and does individual research

Students do research to learn about their issue:

Some questions the students may research-

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 is 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/law- they may be a good person to write

If it is going to be voted on- write to 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

<http://www.house.gov/>,

[http://www.house.gov/house/MemberWWW\\_by\\_State.shtml](http://www.house.gov/house/MemberWWW_by_State.shtml)

US Senate

<http://www.senate.gov/>

[http://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators\\_cfm.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm)

### 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: <http://usgovinfo.about.com/library/weekly/aa020199.htm>

## 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).

## Acknowledgement

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

## Credit

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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

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Sample Letter 2