

Writing a Letter to a Politician!

8th U.S. History, Nov. 2019



Rationale

For the past month and more, we have looked at some of the framing documents that guide our lives in the United States. We have also continued our discussion, through current events and history, of the essential questions of the course about citizenship and identity.

For this project, you will make the Constitution and current events come alive – by applying what you have learned to writing a letter to a politician! To help you strive for additional impact and connect your classes thematically, you'll choose a topic related to your Community Impact Project.

If all goes well, you might even get a reply from the person to whom you write. For the best chance of this, make sure that the person to whom you are writing has the power to do something about your topic. For instance, states and cities tend to make more decisions about education than the federal government does. You are also more likely to get an answer from your own senator or House representative than from someone else's representative or senator.

Possible people you could write to include:

- The House of Representatives member for your district
- One of California's two senators
- One of the nine Supreme Court justices
- Los Angeles mayor Eric Garcetti
- Other local officials: school board, city council, etc.
- California's governor
- A California state Assembly member (like the U.S. House) or state senator
- The president, vice president or a Cabinet official (may be less likely to get read)
- Your ideas!

We will mail the letters (I'll provide stamps) at the end of the project and hope we get some responses!

Time Frame

Tuesday, November 19

- Introduce project
- Brainstorm topics you'd like to research related to your CIP, either *directly* or *broadly* connected.
 - For instance, if you are doing a sports clinic for kids at the local Boys & Girls Club, you could choose a *directly* related topic by writing to a politician about something you think the Pasadena Boys & Girls Club (or organizations like it) needs from the government.
 - Alternately, you could choose a *broadly* related topic by doing research on, for example, the availability of sports fields in lower-income communities, or funding for women's versus men's professional sports.
 - Whichever topic you choose, you need to make sure you have an opinion that you express and something you are asking the politician to do (even if that's simply to be more aware of the issue).

Wednesday or Thursday, November 20 or 21

- Come in ready with a particular topic or topics in mind, related to your CIP, to research for your letter to a politician.
- Look up at least one national House and/or Senate bill that relates to your topic (directly or loosely) OR at least one State Assembly or State Senate Bill that relates.
 - For national bills, go to govtrack.us and use the search feature at the top of the page OR the issues browser at the middle right of the page.
 - For state bills, go to <https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/> and search either by keyword or author (your state Assembly member or state Senator) or both.
 - You may not end up using the bill(s) you find in your letter, but, in your notes, please write down a) the number of the bill; b) the topic or title; c) where it is in the process (in committee, in the full Senate, shelved, etc.). Then show me.
 - If you *do* want to use a bill as a significant part of your letter, you may:
 - Suggest that a bill that previously died be re-proposed during this U.S. Congress or state legislative session or a future U.S. Congress or state legislative session.
 - Suggest a bill slightly different from one that has already been proposed.
 - Propose an entirely new bill and mention any related bills you found.
 - Congratulate your representative/senator for voting yes on a bill you agree with and encourage them to do more of the same. (You could look at their home page to see what issues they care about and what bill they have worked on recently.)
- Find at least two articles (or information sheets, government reports, etc.) on your topic. Make sure they are not too old. Research Library Prep is helpful, along with the New York Times and other newspaper archives. You could also look up news articles about a particular bill. If you want to go to the free web, please talk with me first about what you've found so far.
- Begin deciding to whom you might write your letter (see page 1 for ideas).

Friday, November 22

Weekly current events!

HW due Monday:

- a) Bring in (printed out or in Google Docs) out at least two articles or information sheets on your topic.
- b) Annotate or take notes on at least two pages of each source. These do not have to be the first two pages! If it is a video source, feel free to write down six quotations/facts from the video as your annotations.

Monday, November 25

- Read packet and models on how to write a strong letter to a politician.
- Read over rubric on how to write a strong letter.
- Decide who would be the right person to receive the letter. If you want to see a huge array of agencies to which you could write, try going to <https://www.usa.gov/contact-by-topic#item-211316>. It's also perfectly appropriate and practical to send it to your senator or House rep.
- Begin writing letter, if time.

Tuesday, November 26

- Continue writing letter.
- Work on drafting your letter, making sure to include everything listed on the rubric. It's fine to find more sources as you are writing.
- Remember that the entire letter should fit on one page, single spaced. The length, layout and content should make the person WANT to read it.
- Keep in mind that you are one of the most well-informed eighth graders anywhere in terms of current events! You are an expert, so feel free to sound like one. 😊

Wednesday, November 27

- Discuss current events
- Work on letter, as desired

Monday, December 2

- Put finishing touches on rough draft of letter. Feel free to send it to Ms. Cooper now if it's ready for her to read already.

HW due TOMORROW:

Finish full rough draft of your letter for peer response in class on Tuesday (tomorrow). You do not need to print it out – please just have it available in Google Docs to share with a partner. I will give you credit for having a full rough draft.

Tuesday, December 3

- Peer response on letters!
- Work on revising letters

HW due Wednesday or Thursday:

By the time class starts today, make sure the rough draft of your letter is in your shared history folder for this year, and also please share it with me through an email.

Wednesday or Thursday, December 4 or 5

- Rough draft of letter due digitally to Ms. Cooper by the beginning of class (see above).
- Constitution video and start thinking about midterm in class

Friday, December 6

- Weekly current events presentations!

Monday, December 9

- Address envelopes and mail letters!

Grading Rubric, Letter to a Politician

December 2019, 8th U.S. History

Your letter...

- Makes a specific argument, even referring to a specific bill when possible and relevant (6)
- Tells who you are (including whether you live in this person's district/area), how old you are, and why you care about this issue. How this issue will affect you or your family personally can be helpful if it applies. Also add something about your Community Impact Project if you can! (4)
- Is supremely well written and compelling, with... (10)
 - An intro that makes the reader want to read on
 - No unnecessary words – make it concise
 - Figurative or metaphorical language if appropriate
 - No grammar or spelling errors or typos
 - Thoughtful and powerful word choice
 - Logical arguments
 - Reference to an appropriate counterargument if needed
- Is addressed to someone who has the power (now or in the future) to do something about the issue you are writing about. In other words, make sure this person is the right person to contact about this issue. If useful, *say why you chose this person* in your letter. (3)
- Uses at least two strong pieces of evidence from your research, such as facts or quotations (4)
- Mentions the sources the pieces of evidence came from in the text of the letter. For example: "According to a Los Angeles Times news article from January 11, 2017..." or "As listed in the text of H.R. 328 on the House of Representatives website..." (3)
- The final draft thoroughly responds to peer response and Ms. Cooper's comments (2)
- Letter fits on ~1 page using a readable, reasonably spaced and sized font (2)
- Formatted properly as a formal letter (see model) (2)
- And - you used your class time productively and creatively! (4)

GRAND TOTAL

____/40 = ____

Image from <http://www.legbranch.com/theblog/2016/7/1/is-the-house-of-representatives-deinstitutionalizing>