



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

(60-90 minutes over two days)

OBJECTIVE

Students write letters to the editor of a local newspaper about a candidate or issue.

MATERIALS

Letter writing materials; sample letters to the editor; Internet access (optional)

GET READY

- ✓ You can find some excellent ideas on advocacy letter writing in *Just Add Consciousness: A Guide to Social Activism*, published by Oxfam America and Campus Outreach Opportunity League, 2000. This publication is available on the web at the following address: <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/>.
- ✓ Collect examples of letters to the editor to share with your class.

INSTRUCTIONS

- ✓ Students should research candidates and/or issues and decide which candidate/issue they wish to write their letter about.
- ✓ Share with your students examples of letters to the editor. Point out what makes each letter effective or ineffective.
- ✓ Have students write individual letters and send them to a local newspaper. In addition to the community's daily paper(s), consider other publication outlets such as the high school paper, local college paper, alternative newspapers, and community organization newsletters, as well as national news magazines and news shows (such as National Public Radio's Morning Edition). Students may have greater odds of getting their letters published in smaller publications. Have several students send their letters to the same newspaper. It is likely that at least one will be chosen for publication. Encourage students to

consider the following guidelines in developing their letters:

- ✓ Be direct – The letter should be short and focus on one or two main points (such as asking for others to support a candidate or highlighting how an issue impacts their life).
- ✓ Be timely – The chances of publication will increase if students refer to a recent article, editorial, or letter in the newspaper they are sending their letters to. Students should include the title, author, and date of any article referenced.
- ✓ Check the format – Students should examine other letters to the editor from the newspaper and develop their letters in a similar style in terms of length, number of paragraphs, etc.
- ✓ Be professional – Have students address the letter to the editor by his/her name. Students should type their letters, proofread them before mailing, and make sure they have included contact information (student's name, address, phone number and e-mail).
- ✓ In addition to the student proofreading his/her letter, have students review a peer's letter and make sure that you read all letters before they are mailed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ★ *What was your letter about? What made it effective?*
- ★ *Why is it important to publicly express your thoughts and opinions?*
- ★ *Do you think publicly posting your letter impacted other people's thoughts and beliefs?*