

Text-Type Writing Study: Personal Communication — Letter

The letter is a basic form of personal communication. It can be used for many purposes: to describe, to explain, to share a story, to persuade, to instruct, or to retell. This brief text-type writing study focuses on letter writing conventions. Students can apply their learning by writing a letter to tell about how something they did made a difference.

1. IMMERSION INTO THE TEXT TYPE

Time: approximately 15 minutes (Can be combined with Pre-assessment)

Grouping: whole class

Materials: *Art for the Birds*

- Recall with students that they've learned about how a person's actions can make a difference to the world by, for example, keeping the world healthier, keeping wildlife safe, minimizing waste, and reducing energy use.

We need to think about all we have learned about doing something that makes a difference to the world. We learned that turning off the water when we brush our teeth saves water, and that saves energy.

- Reread the book *Art for the Birds*, with the students stopping to discuss what actions the class took (making window art, writing a letter to ask other classes to join in).

We read that the class in the book took two different kinds of actions. What are they? Yes, they made window art to stop birds from flying into their classroom windows, and they wrote a letter to the principal, asking her to suggest that all classes make window art to protect the birds.

- After rereading, return to the letter on page 11 and discuss what the class included in their letter to the principal (greeting, message, closing).

What different parts of the letter did the class include in their letter to the principal?

- Ask students to consider why the letter includes the different elements.

Why did the class include a greeting at the beginning of the letter? Why did the students include their class name in the closing?

2. PRE-ASSESSMENT (Optional)

Time: approximately 20 minutes

(Can be combined with Immersion into the Text Type)

Grouping: individuals and partners

Materials: large sheets of paper and markers

- Remind students that the class in the story wrote a letter to their principal to tell her about something they thought the entire school should do. Refer to the class 'Action to Make a Difference/Effect on Earth' chart from the lesson for *10 Things I Can Do to Help My World*, and ask students to choose one action that they would like to ask their family to do at home.
- Ask students to write a letter that encourages their family to do their chosen action at home. Remind students to include the elements of a letter (greeting, message, closing) in their writing. You can circulate through the classroom and scribe for students, as needed.

Supporting Writers: Give students an opportunity to share their thinking with a partner before recording their thoughts.

Extending Writers: Encourage students to record more than one action if they have more ideas.

- If you choose, assess each student's response using the **Assessment Rubric for Letter Writing** to identify levels of key skills and understanding. Look for common needs among students to help plan future instructions and demonstrations to strengthen students' existing knowledge.

3. MODELLED AND SHARED WRITING

Time: three sessions of approximately 20 minutes each

Grouping: whole class

Materials: chart paper and markers

Choose a Topic

- Considering the texts *10 Things I Can Do to Help My World* and *How to be an Eco Class*, together choose a topic for writing from a shared experience where students have tried to make a difference. For example, a topic for writing could be always using both sides of a piece of paper..

Set a Purpose for Writing

- Tell students that you will all work together to write a letter telling the principal about how the class always uses both sides of the paper, and why.

We are going to write a letter to our principal to tell her about how we have been using both sides of our paper, and why we've been doing this.

PLANNING AND RESEARCHING

- Ask students to meet with a partner or small group and come up with one way that using both sides of the paper helps the world.

Discuss with your partner one way that using both sides of the paper makes a difference to our world. This is a reason for us to use both sides of the paper, just like the reason for making window art in *Art for the Birds* was to protect the birds from hitting the window. We need to give our principal a reason why we've been using both sides of the paper.

- Have partners or groups share their ideas with the class (e.g., "We do not have as much garbage." "We use less paper so we don't have to buy more." "We help save some trees. Trees keep our air healthy.").
- Recall with students the elements of a letter (greeting, message, closing).

Supporting Writers: You may need to provide a supportive structure for a few students, for example, "Why do we want to use both sides of the paper? How does that make a difference to the world? What does it do for the amount of garbage and recycling in our school?"

Extending Writers: Some students may have several ideas. Tell them they can write many ideas when they do their own writing about an action that they can do, but now they should choose their best ideas so that lots of people can share ideas about how using both sides of paper makes a difference to the world.

DRAFTING

Write the Letter

- Explain to students that the greeting is the first part of a letter that we write.

First we need to write the greeting to the person we are writing our letter for—our principal. We can write the same kind of greeting as in this letter to Ms. Lee, but we will need to put our principal's name here instead of hers.

- Confer with students on what the main message of the letter will be. Ask students to recall the reasons for using both sides of pieces of paper that they discussed in the Planning and Researching section. As students volunteer their ideas, write them down, sharing the pen with students occasionally and weaving in prompts for writing concepts. Vary your prompts to meet the range of writing development demonstrated in your classroom.

You told me that we need to save trees by cutting down fewer trees, so we use both sides of the paper. We may want to say "We are making a difference by using both sides of our paper." 'Are' is one of our word wall words. Help me spell the word 'are.' I will write 'make a difference,' now you help me with the word 'by.'

- Weave in comments about writing a letter. Prompts that may help include:
 - How do I start the letter to the principal? Let's look at the letter Mr. Sloane's class wrote.
 - We have said that we are making a difference by using both sides of our paper. What other details could we add to explain why this will help to make a difference?
 - How can we tell who wrote this letter? Where do we put our closing?

Supporting Writers: Ask students needing support to demonstrate concepts such as where to start writing and predicting a letter from the sound at the beginning of a word.

Extending Writers: Writers ready for extension may be able to share the pen and write down a word or phrase, and engage in movement to the next line.

REVISING

- Reread the letter aloud to make sure it makes sense and that all the information needed is there. Focus on the conventions of a letter.

Extending Writers: You may wish to work with more advanced writers in a small group to make the letter clearer and to add more details.

Consider the following revision concepts:

- Should ideas be added or deleted?
- Do we have our ideas in the correct order?
- What words could be improved with more interesting ones?
- Should these sentences be joined together?

Show students how to make changes and model your own thought processes as you make changes (e.g., "I'll put a line through this word that we can change to make it sound better and write the new word above the crossed-out one.")

EDITING

- Read over the revised letter, checking the spelling and punctuation.
- Reread the letter out loud, checking each item, one at a time. Consider some of the following prompts:
 - We need to check that word on the Word Wall. Can you find it?
 - Let's say that word slowly to hear the beginning sound.
 - Did we put a comma after 'Dear' and 'Sincerely' in the greeting and closing?
 - Did we use capitals at the beginning of each sentence?
 - Do we need a question mark here, since we are asking our principal a question?

Extending Writers: You may wish to work with more advanced writers in a small group to begin building or add to an editing checklist. Add items gradually and check one item at a time.

Spelling

Underline spellings you're not sure of.
Check spellings using the Word Wall.

Punctuation

Add a capital letter to the beginning of each sentence.
Add a period at the end of each statement.
Add a question mark at the end of each question.

SHARING AND PUBLISHING

Make a Final Copy

- Prepare a final version of the letter on chart paper. Reread with the students.

Reflect on Statements

- Take time to reflect on the message of the letter. Offer prompts:
 - What were the reasons we gave the principal for our action?
 - Were there other reasons for using both sides of the paper that we forgot to mention?
 - Is our explanation clear?

4. GUIDED AND INDEPENDENT WRITING

Time: two sessions of approximately 20 minutes

Grouping: whole class and individuals

Materials: paper and pencils for students

PLANNING AND RESEARCHING

- Tell students that they will be writing their own letter to the principal. Write three topics on the board.

Pick up garbage

Turn out lights when
leaving a room

Recycle materials

- Ask students to choose one of the topics—something that they do to make a difference—and plan a letter to the principal. Remind them to include the three elements of a letter (greeting, message, and closing) and to include at least one reason in their message for doing the action. You may wish to sketch a chart on the board as shown below.

If I choose recycling materials, I might say that it will save energy by not making more of something but reusing it instead. If you chose 'turn out the lights,' what might you say as the reason for the action? What about for 'picking up garbage'?

Action to make a difference	Reasons to do it

DRAFTING

Write the Letter

- Remind students to use their planned ideas to write their letter to the principal. Encourage students to include details and reasons for how their action makes a difference.

Supporting Writers: Form a small guided-writing group for students needing extra support to put their ideas into letter format. If students need extra support, you may consider scribing their ideas with frequent rereadings to see if they have clarified the elements of a letter to include. Alternatively, you could provide a sentence starter (e.g., 'I decided to ...') Have the student tell you what they did to make a difference.

Extending Writers: Encourage these writers to add additional information and details to their letter. Students may wish to include a persuasive appeal to the principal to encourage other classes to take the same action, as in the letter in Art for the Birds. If so, point out to students how the letter includes a question and supporting reason for the principal.

REVISING

- Have students reread their letters and ask themselves if they have included all of the information needed for the principal to understand their 'making a difference' action. You may wish to have students form pairs to reread their letters and provide feedback to each other. Some prompts include:
 - Do all of my sentences make sense?
 - Should I add more details or reasons to help explain my action?
 - Should something be deleted that is not necessary?

Supporting Writers: Form a small group as necessary to reread each letter and provide group suggestions for adding or deleting information and checking that each sentence makes sense.

Extending Writers: You may decide to work with more advanced writers in a small group and encourage them to add more details and supporting reasons.

EDITING

- Ask students to check their letters for spelling and punctuation using the Word Wall and other resources.
- Ask students to check that each sentence is complete and starts with a capital.

- Remind students that the greeting and closing need capital letters, as do all names.
- Remind students of proper punctuation: questions should end with question marks and statements should end with periods.

Supporting Writers: Form a small group as necessary to reread and correct punctuation and spelling. Model the use of the Word Wall.

Extending Writers: Encourage more advanced writers to use the Editing Checklist to edit their letters.

SHARING AND PUBLISHING

Time: two sessions of approximately 15 minutes each

Grouping: small groups and individuals

- Divide the class into small groups and encourage them to share their letters with group members. Emphasize the importance of listening to each other and providing positive feedback.

Remember to look at the person who is reading to you and to tell them what you liked about their letter.

- Ask students to make final copies of their letters to be given to the principal.

5. ASSESSMENT AND SELF-EVALUATION

Time: 10 minutes if done as a class, or a few minutes per student if done in centres

Grouping: whole class and individuals

Materials: Self-Assessment BLM and Assessment BLM

Reflection and Self-Evaluation

- Ask students to reflect on their published letters as a class. Raise questions such as
 - What things do you think we did well?
 - How could we make our letters better?
- Ask students to reflect on their letters using the Self-Assessment: Letter Writing BLM (e.g., What did I do well? How could I make my letter better?).

Assessment

- Using the Assessment Rubric for Letter Writing BLM, document each student's growth in writing a letter, noting the skills and understandings that he or she is demonstrating. If you had students write a Pre-Assessment piece, compare it with the student's final letter to assist you in noting areas of growth.