



Overview:

In a world of blackberrys, text messaging, and emails, people living in Afghanistan still rely on letter writers. Seventy two percent of Afghans are illiterate, so those men who sit on small stools with papers and applications ready to write for those who can't find that they have a booming business. People rely on the letter writers for several reasons. One reason is that they need them to get what has to be done for their families completed. Another reason is that Afghans are practicing their new freedom of speech. If they are dissatisfied with something in their government, they feel they should write to the proper authorities in hopes of seeing some kind of change. In Afghanistan we see a country with people who can't read or write and desperately want to write letters. In our own country, people can read and write, and letter writing has become a lost art.

Grade Level: 5-6

Subject: Language Arts

Standards: Students will be able to write letters that state the purpose, make requests or give compliments and use letter format.

Classroom Activities:

Activity #1 Are you a letter writer?

- Begin by discussing students' personal experiences with letter writing.
 - What letters have you ever written? Thank you notes? Letters from camp? Pen pal letters? Can you remember the last time you wrote a letter? (not an email)
 - To whom do you send letters? Who sends letters to you?
 - What kind of letters have you ever received?
 - How many of you have kept the letters you have received?
 - Do any of you still write letters by hand, or do you only send "electronic" letters (e-mail)? If you don't write letters by hand, why don't you?
 - Do you consider it a little more special to receive a letter than to receive an e-mail?
- Why do the people in Afghanistan have people who write their letters for them?
- Can you remember what percentage of people there cannot read or write? 72%
- What do you think it would be like if you were the only person in your family who could read or write? What would be different?
- Why do you think that in a country with an illiteracy rate of 72% people want so desperately to have someone write letters for them, yet in our own country, people actually can read and write and letter writing has become a lost art?
- Ask students to go home and talk to their parents or grandparents about letter writing. Do they remember writing and receiving lots of letters when they were growing up? Do they

still write and receive letters today? Ask them if they would mind sharing a saved letter. Have them ask their parents why they think letter writing has become a lost art.

2. Activity #2 The Lost Art of Letter Writing

- There was a time when writing letters was our only means of communicating over long distances. In today's world, we can pick up a phone and speak to anyone anywhere in a second or two, or we can sit down to a computer and type off an email in a couple of minutes. Sure it is nice to talk to someone over the phone, but to read a message in a letter, knowing someone took the time to write it, makes it much more meaningful. It is permanent. Once written, you can read it over and over again, and cherish it time after time, knowing that someone cared enough to take the time to write. After all, writing is not an automatic response. It requires thought and concentration -- and effort.
- Do you remember in the NewsDepth feature the story about the one woman who has a 5th grade son who is the only one in the family who can read or write and they have to rely on the letter writers to get what they think needs to be done for their families?
- Present your students with this letter writing activity: Imagine that you have no cell phone, no computer. You and your classmates would like to communicate a special need you have in your classroom to your principal. (Discuss some possibilities for something they think they need. It can be anything. They may need to go on a field trip or need some kind of equipment or educational materials for their room.) Now you are to write a letter to the principal asking for his help in acquiring what you need for you and your classmates. You will need to go over the basic parts of a letter with your students.
- As a follow up activity, have your students once again imagine that their principal granted them their request. This time they are to write a simple thank you note. Ask your students if they ever write thank you notes. Stress the importance of that practice.
- NewsDepth has a feature on its website entitled "Speak Out". <http://www.wviz.org/newsdepthkids/speak.html> "It is a chance for you to tell us what's on your mind. You can also tell us what you learned from this week's NewsDepth program." Ask your students as part of this activity to send a letter to NewsDepth WVIZ/PBS ideastream, 1375 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115.

3. Activity #3 You are the Letter Writer

- Assign your students to a partner or have them select their own partner. This will be a role playing activity. One student is to be the letter writer and the other person is to be the person who cannot read or write. That person would like to send a letter to someone they greatly admire or someone who has had a special influence on them in some way. The two are to work together to compose and write a letter to that person. One will dictate the letter, and the other will help with the choice of words and actually write the letter. Share the letters with the class.

Online Lesson Plans (standards included at websites)

Letter writing, the lost art

http://www.eduref.org/Virtual/Lessons/Language_Arts/Writing/WCP0224.html

So much history has been learned from the letters and diaries that were so carefully and thoughtfully written in the past. Today, letter writing is a lost art, replaced by the cell phone and

email. Lives are busy with little time to sit down and write a letter, and yet what can replace the thrill of a thick envelope filled with news from a friend or relative. This unit will explore friendly letters and business letters with the hope that students will take the time to share, in writing, their lives and their times with others.

Letter Writing Lessons and Tips

<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/letters-and-journals/resource/26369.html>

Letters take many forms and serve a variety of purposes. Students practice the fine art of letter writing using one or more of the online activities, for grades K-12.

Better Letters

http://www.education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson281.shtml

Is letter writing a lost art? Education World provides five lessons to revive student interest in writing friendly letters. Included: links to letter-writing resources, rubrics and more lessons.

I'm Gonna Sit Write Down and Write Someone a Letter

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?ID=294

Through the vast online resources available from EDSITement, you and your students can read the correspondence of the famous, the infamous and the ordinary, some of whom lived through extraordinary times. Use these fascinating letters as a starting point for discussion of and practice in the conventions and purposes of letter writing.

Letter Writing Lesson Plan

http://classroom-activities.suite101.com/article.cfm/letter_writing_lesson_plan Letter writing lesson plan

Additional Resources

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/176272/how_and_why_to_rediscover_the_lost.html?cat=47

How and why to rediscover the lost art of letter writing.

There is a great danger in the loss of the letter. The danger is that we will become the first generation in history to leave no written record of ourselves. If George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, or Ernest Hemingway had only used e-mail, would we have the same record of them that we possess through their letters and journals today? If Jefferson had sent text messages to Adams, think what would have been lost to history.