

Dear John

By **Ferri Lockhart** for Blue Ridge Public Television (WBRA, WMSY, WSBN)
Roanoke City Schools, Roanoke, VA

Grade Level: 3 – 8

Time Allotment: Two 45 minute classes.

Overview: The purpose of this lesson is to teach students to write formal and informal letters.

Subject Matter: Language Arts

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- understand and apply the steps of the writing process
- identify the parts of a personal and business letter.
- write a personal letter.
- write a business letter.
- communicate effectively using available technology
- write and type a formal business letter, using the standard block-style format that is accepted by most businesses.
- define and label parts of a formal business letter.

Standards:

The objectives listed may be used in part to address the following Virginia Standards of Learning: Virginia Department of Education

<http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Superintendent/Sols/home.shtml>

English

- 3.10 The student will write stories, letters, simple explanations, and short reports across all content areas
- 4.8 The student will edit writing for correct grammar, capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure
- 5.8 The student will write for a variety of purposes: to describe, to inform, to entertain, and to explain.
- 6.6 The student will write narratives, descriptions, and explanations.
- 6.7 The student will edit writing for correct grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure.
- 7.8 The student will develop narrative, expository, and persuasive writing.
- 7.9 The student will edit writing for correct grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, and paragraphing.

- 8.7 The student will write in a variety of forms, including narrative, expository, persuasive, and informational.
- 8.8 The student will edit writing for correct grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, and paragraphing.

Media Components:

Video:

How to Write a Report and Letter available from United Streaming
(www.unitedstreaming.com)

Web Sites:

You will need flash loaded on your computer for these sites to work.

<http://www.auspost.com.au/EDP/0,1398,CH3213%257EMO19,00.html>

http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/letter_generator/

Materials:

For the classroom

- Computer
- Internet connection
- Projector or TV for computer
- Computer lab

For each student

- Copy of blank letter to principal

Prep for Teachers:

- The teacher should download and preview the United Streaming video as indicated in the Learning Activities section.
- Make copies of blank letter to principal.
- Bookmark all of the URLs and give a list to students. You may want to add the sites to your Portaportal or some other network bookmarking system, so you do not have to bookmark it on each computer. You can go to portaportal.com to set up your own account.

Introductory Activity:

Ask: “Why do people write letters?” As the students brainstorm, list their ideas on the board, overhead, SmartBoard etc. Discuss each answer briefly. **Ask:** “How do most people write letters now?” The students should talk about sending email as a way of letter writing. **Say:** “Sometimes people write letters to convince other people to do things. We are going to write a very quick letter to our principal to convince her that we need to have a free time in the middle of the day. This should only be about 3 or 4 sentences. Do not

put your names on these letters. We will use this blank letter that I have already started for you.” (Give each student a copy of the blank letter, found at end of this lesson). “Remember, get right to the point about why the principal should give you free time in the middle of the day.” Give the students about 5 or 10 minutes. Take the papers up when they have finished, shuffle them and pass them out again. **Say:** “I want each of you to read the letter you just received. If you think it is a convincing letter, raise your hand.” Have the students who raised their hands read their letter. Allow several students to read their letters. **Ask:** “Do you think that we could really convince our principal to give us free time?” Accept answers. **Say,** “Now that we have written a quick letter we need to learn about the parts of a letter so we can become better letter writers.”

Learning Activities:

Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION** by saying:

“We are going to watch a United Streaming clip to learn about the parts of an informal letter. A friendly letter uses a format to make it easier for the reader to understand and also to provide useful information. Listen to this clip and see if you can find out how many parts a personal or friendly letter has.”

Start United Streaming at beginning and **Pause** when you see *Five Parts to a Personal Letter* and you hear the narrator say the same. (Counter 0:21)

Ask: “How many parts are there to a personal or friendly letter?” (A personal or friendly letter has five parts).

Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION** by saying:

“I want you to listen to see if you can hear what the five parts of an informal letter are.”

Resume video. **Pause** after the words *Signature Line* comes up. (0:30) **Ask:** “What are the five parts of a personal letter?” (heading, greeting, body, complimentary close and signature line)

Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION** by saying:

“We are going to look at each part of the letter so we will know how to write our own. I want you to listen to this part of the video and see if you can tell me what is included in the heading.” **Resume** video. **Pause** at 1:03 or after the narrator says “...a line should be skipped between the return address and date.” **Ask:** “What is included in the heading?” (the name of the person sending the letter, return address and date).

Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION** by saying:

“Now we will watch the video to see how to write a greeting.” **Resume** video. **Pause** at 1:35 or when the narrator says “...it can end with an explanation mark to show emphasis.” **Ask:** “How do we write a greeting?” (either formally or informally and it usually ends in a comma or explanation mark)

Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION** by saying:

“After the greeting comes the body. Before you can start writing the body there are two things you have to do. Let’s listen to the video to see what two things should be done.”

Resume video: **Pause** at 2:00 or when you hear the narrator say, “...indent the first

paragraph.” **Ask:** “What should you do before you write the body?” (skip a line from the greeting and indent the first paragraph).

Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION** by saying: “I want you to watch this part of the video to see what you put in the body of the letter.” **Resume** video. **Pause** at 2:18 or when the narrator says “...to make it easier to read.” **Ask:** “What do you put in the body of the letter?” (the main text or the message to your reader).

Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION** by saying:

“After the body is the closing or complimentary close. I want you to watch the video to see if you can answer this question- what is a complimentary close?” **Resume** video.

Pause at 2:38 or when the narrator says, “...a polite way to end a letter.” **Ask:** “What is a complimentary close?” (a polite way to end a letter.)

Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION** by saying:

“I want you to look at the video to see how you should write the complimentary close.”

Resume video. **Pause** at 2:47 or when the narrator says “...it should be indented to the same column as the heading.” **Ask:** “How should you write the complimentary close?” (it should begin with a capital letter and end with a comma and it should be indented to the same column as the heading).

Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION** by saying:

“Now we must add a closure line. Watch the video to see what is included in the signature and the different ways we can write it.” **Resume** video. **Pause** at 3:28 or when the narrator says “...as long as you sign the letter.” **Ask:** “What is included in the signature and how can we write it?” (your name, indent to the same column as the close and skip a line or two to type or print your name; if it is really informal, you can just sign your name).

Culminating Activity:

Provide students with a **FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION** by saying:

“We are going to go to the computer lab and use an online letter writer to help us write a personal and business letter. I want everyone to go to the following site:

<http://www.auspost.com.au/EDP/0,1398,CH3213%257EMO19,00.html>

Halfway down the page click on *New Letter Writing Interactive*. You will see Zack and the title, “Let’s Write a Letter”. Click on *ENTER*. **Say,** “Now, I want everyone to click on *About Personal Letters*. As we read about personal letters I want you to find the answer to this question: Why would you write a personal letter?”

Either have the class read that section silently or read it to them. After it is read,

Ask: “Who knows the answer to my question- why would you write a personal letter?”

(to thank someone, or congratulate them, share family and school news, pass on interesting information, describe what’s been happening, or tell funny stories.) “Now I want you to click on *sample personal letter 1*, located on the top right of your letter. I want everyone to read that letter and see if you can find the answers to the following questions: Who will receive this letter and what was the purpose of the letter?” Give time for students to read the letter or read it to them. **Say,** “Now that we have read the letter,

tell me who will receive it?” (Gran) “What was the purpose of the letter?” (to thank her for the CD and also update her on what she had been doing.) “I want you to click *Close Window*, located on the top right of the letter. Click on *Sample personal letter 2*, located on the right side of your screen. I want you to read this letter and we will answer the same two questions as before. The questions are: who will receive this letter and what was the purpose of the letter?” Give time to read the letter or read it to them. “Now that you have read this letter, who will receive it?” (Sam) “What is the purpose of the letter?” (finding out how his friend is doing since he moved.) “Now I want you to click *close window* located on the top right of your letter. After that screen closes, click on *Close Window* which is located at the bottom center of the window. We are now ready to write our own letter but we will let the computer help us. I want you to click on *write a letter*, then click on *write a personal letter*. You are going to write a letter to a friend telling them about a big event that took place in your life. You may make this event up or exaggerate an event that really happened or you may have a real event you want to tell. For example, your team may have won the big game by you making the last two points, or your photograph just took first place in the art show.” Allow time for any questions. **Say:** “We are going to select a letterhead. I want you to look at the letter heads and find one that you like. After you have found one that you like I want you to click on it then click on *select*. I want you to go through the next screens and make sure you fill out everything that is needed for a personal letter. Remember what we learned in the United Streaming video clips. Make sure you have typed in all the correct parts for a personal letter. After you type each section click on the *move on* button located on the left of the letter. If you forget what a section consists of, click on the *hints* button. For the return address, I want you to put the school address.” (write this on the board). “When you are finished, click on *view my letter* then raise your hand before you print.” (or use the procedure you follow in your school regarding printing)

Note to teacher:

After you have gone through the personal letter writing you can go back and follow the same procedure except you will select *Business Letter*. For the business letter, give them the following scenario. They are the CEO of a big clothing store. They are to write a letter to a star, athlete, author, etc. asking that person to endorse their line of clothes. You may also want to use the second web site which is another online letter writing program if the students need more practice.

Cross-Curricular Extensions:

English:

- Find student pen pals and write personal letters.
- Write a letter to a character from a book.
- Write a business letter to a company asking for more information on their product.

Math:

- Write to a mathematician.

Science:

- Talk to the science teacher to see what scientists they have studied and write a letter to them asking about their discovery.

Community Connections:

- Invite someone from the post office to class to discuss letters and the process of mailing letters.

Ideas for Students with Special Needs

- Read the text aloud to the class so all students will understand.
- Use a screen reader for the visually impaired and for students who have difficulty reading.
- Using word prediction for the letter writing.
- Use voice recognition for students who have difficulty writing.
- Allow for letter to be written on paper instead of computer.

Middle School USA
123 Street
Roanoke, VA 24107

January 14th, 2006

Dear Principal,

Sincerely,

A Concerned Student