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We've Got Letters

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Newspaper in Education: A Classroom Resources By Maryam Ahranjani

The Washington Post

We've Got Letters



Collage by Carol Porter for The Washington Post

Lesson: Personal notes and business letters are important forms of communication, documentation and records for historians and sociologists. Beginning with “Dear Colleagues” letters, our You and Your Rights lesson focuses on transgender student access to school bathrooms.

Difficulty Medium

Primary Disciplines English, Government, Health, Language Arts, Life Skills,

Additional Disciplines Career Education, Character Education, Media Arts

Classroom Worksheets:

1. From Me to You
2. Letters Take Many Forms
3. You and Your Rights

Alphabet books, the first books of letters for most children, introduce upper and lower case letters, sounds represented by letters, and the tie between those words and objects. Through the activities and reprints in this guide, students will consider the different uses of letters in their daily life, in the media and by authors.

The Word Study, “A Word About Epistles, Communiqués and Letters,” moves from etymology to Epistles and epistolary novels. Students are asked to practice writing different notes of appreciation.

This guide includes a dateline activity and KidsPost article for younger students.

DeNeen Brown’s article about the Library of Congress collection of love letters and

A geography element is added when students are asked to locate places on a map. Maps are provided at nie.washingtonpost.com in the More Resources section for use with this activity.

Write a Friendly Letter

English, Journalism, Media Literacy, Sociology

Teachers may begin this activity with a discussion of letters that students have written and letters that their families receive. Have these been in the form of thank you notes?

Thank you notes (handwritten or sent by email) may be written to express personal and professional appreciation — for gifts, special occasions and opportunities, [job interviews](#) and assistance.

“[Thank you, Grandma](#)” is intended as an introduction to writing the personal thank you note. Four examples are provided, starting from the simplest to the more detailed. Questions are provided for discussion and application of guidelines.

Two [letters of appreciation](#), written in 1903 and in 2016, were written to school officials. Note the context in which they were written. The third letter is an example of what may be [sent to patrons](#) and others in the community who assist school clubs, athletic and academic endeavors. These are meant to give students awareness of other people who would appreciate acknowledgement. Discussion questions and suggested writing activities are included in the handouts.

Also include is an article from a parent to her child’s teacher. Read and discuss “[The letter I had to write to my child’s teacher](#).” What details are included in the letter that relate to the teacher’s classroom management?

Look for Advocacy Letters

English, Journalism, Media Arts, Media Literacy

Businesses, organizations and individuals committed to a cause will buy [advocacy advertisements](#) in newspapers. The [full-page](#) advertisements, in particular, grab reader attention, succinctly take their stand and state their cause. Some can be very effective in their reaching their target audience.

They may appear in the form of a letter to [thank customers](#), to acknowledge a position taken [by the president](#) or to urge action by members of congress. Show students examples of these advertisements to determine the target audience, the message and the effectiveness. Students may be asked several weeks in advance of this lesson (or after) to look for advertising in the form of a letter.

Discovery in Letters

- [100 – First World War](#)
- [Book Report Alternative: A Character's Letter to the Editor](#)
- [George W. Bush's Inauguration Day Letter to Barack Obama](#)
- [Letter Writing in English](#)
- [Letters, Telegrams, and Photographs Illustrating Factors that Affected the Civil War](#)
- [Mary Shelly letters discovered in Essex](#)
- [National Archives Gets Lost Lincoln Letter](#)
- [Rare Walt Whitman letter, written for a dying soldier, found in National Archives](#)

Resource Graphic



The Washington Post

Understand History Through Letters

English, Social Studies, U.S. History

Letters are often appreciated at the time they are received, but their impact can go far beyond that day and year. Letters can be appreciated alone or in a collection. They can bring alive times of war and peace, enhance our understanding of historic and literary figures, and reflect cultures and the impact of decisions upon individuals.

Teachers can illustrate these concepts with letters in the [National Archives](#) and [Library of Congress](#) collections.

- [Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789](#)
- Poet and author Walt Whitman [wrote letters](#) for illiterate and injured soldiers [during the Civil War](#)
- In war-torn Syria letters have been written by and to children
 - [“Syrian girl who tweeted from inside Aleppo](#) begs President Trump to save her friends”
 - [Letters from Syrian children](#)
 - [Letters from WWII refugees](#) to Syrian children

Teacher are encouraged to use the letters in this month's guide for students' to practice using letters to illustrate an idea.

- [Letter of appreciation](#), Stanhope Dodson, written 1903
- [Letter written by Bush daughters](#) to Obama daughters, 2017

The Library of Congress has sponsored a National Reading-Writing promotional program, [Letters About Literature](#). Teachers might share the works of [national](#) and [state](#) winners. The LOC Center for the Book [teaching guide](#) offers tips for doing such a project.

Know What to Excerpt

English, Social Studies

Using letters to illustrate a point, to show understanding of a topic and to support a statement is done by students writing a research or position paper, reporters writing news and feature articles, and historians.

At the end of The Post article "[The touching letter the Bush twins wrote to Sasha and Malia Obama](#) about being first daughters," the writer has included the entire letter sent to Sasha and Malia as their family prepared to leave residency in the White House. Teachers can give this letter to students to read and in small groups discuss the possible topics this letter could illustrate. After the group has decided on a topic, they should work together to select two to three passages to quote in their paper or oral presentation. When finished, ask each group to present their topic and to explain the passages they will excerpt. After this activity, teachers can give students the article written by Katie Mettler. Discuss the article's content and the excerpts that Mettler used.

Excerpts form a large part of DeNeen Brown's "[Ageless love letters](#)." Give The Post article to students to read. Which of the passages excerpted from the letters:

- Reveal attributes and character of the individuals?
- Indicate style of the letter writer?
- Communicate something about the mores of the time?

"[Excerpts Add Depth](#)" is provided for teachers to use to guide students through the process of deciding which passage(s) to select for excerpts.

Read About Letters

- [Dear Mr. President: Letters to the Oval Office from the Files of the National Archives](#)
 - [Epistolary Fiction: Stories Told Via Letters, Diaries & Journals](#)
 - [In Their Own Words: Letters From History](#)
 - [The Last Goodbye: A History of the World in Resignation Letters](#)
 - [Letter From Birmingham Jail](#)
 - [Letters of Note: Correspondence Deserving of a Wider Audience](#)
 - [Love Letters of Great Men](#)
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YOU and YOUR RIGHTS UNIT

Address Transgender Student Access to School Bathrooms Government, Health, Journalism, Media Arts, Social Studies

G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board, a case involving a Virginia student's rights was making its way to the U.S. Supreme Court until February 22, 2017, when it was remanded to the 4th Circuit Court.

This is one in a series of closer examination of students' rights — and responsibilities, You and Your Rights. [This guide](#) relates to letters through the inclusion of "Dear Colleagues" letters that provide guidance and clarification to those who are to implement civil rights laws. Resources provided include *Washington Post* reprints and student handouts.

[Timeline](#): Historical Background of *G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board*

[Resource](#): Legal Background

[Stakeholders](#): Perspectives on the Issue

[Student Activity](#): Check Your Understanding

[Student Activity](#): In Your School

This multi-stage exploration of the legal rights of students was prepared by [Maryam Ahranjani](#), Assistant Professor of Law at the University of New Mexico School of Law, where she teaches Constitutional Rights, Criminal Law, and Criminal Procedure. Co-author of the textbook *Youth Justice in America* (2nd ed. 2014), Professor Ahranjani's research and writing interests include students' access to public education. Prior to teaching at UNM, Professor Ahranjani taught law in Guatemala, served as a rule of law consultant to USAID and State Department projects, and served as Associate Director of the National [Marshall-Brennan Constitutional Literacy Project](#) at American University Washington College of Law in Washington, D.C.

Post articles and guest commentary and links are provided in this guide. To read more on the topic of transgender student access to school bathrooms, here are some suggested titles:

- White House press secretary [Sean Spicer presenting the Trump administration point of view](#).
- ["Trump is right on transgender bathroom laws"](#)
- [Supreme Court Vacates](#), Remands Transgender Bathroom Case
- [A Guide to Restroom Access for Transgender Workers](#)
- [Gender Revolution](#): A Journey with Katie Couric

SHORTER DISCUSSION OF THE TOPIC

Any section of the larger unit may be used by teachers. In addition, we provide these additional resources for a shorter study of the right of transgender students.

Read an Editorial

Health, Journalism, Government, Social Studies, U.S. History

The editorial board is separate from the reporting and feature writing staff. The editors present the point of view of the newspaper. Read and discuss Post Editorial, "[Abandoning transgender students](#)," February 24, 2017. Teachers will note that a wider margin is provided to allow room to annotate the editorial as students read.

Read the Editorial Cartoon

Art, English, Health, Journalism, Psychology, Social Studies

Editorial cartoonists present visual commentary. Read the February 24, 2017, "Tom Toles | [Trump's New Security Guard](#)." Discussion questions are provided to aid analysis of the cartoon.

Read KidsPost

English, Social Studies

KidsPost, for our younger students, features Joe Maldonado, a 9-year-old from New Jersey. He has become the first openly transgender member of the Cub Scouts. Give students "[Openly transgender boy welcomed into Cub Scouts](#)." Teachers who wish to discuss a change in community and organizational attitudes will find quotations from Joe's mother, Joe and a statement from the national BSA.

Post NIE Guide Editor & Writer | Carol Lange

Post NIE Guide Art Editor | Carol Porter

Resource Graphic



National Center for Transgender Equality

In The Know

Abeyance	Legal jargon for “undetermined” (2)
Bullying	Bullying is aggressive physical contact, words or actions to cause another person injury or discomfort. Cyberbullying uses an electronic device for acts such as threatening emails. (3)
Discrimination	Unequal treatment of persons, for a reason that has nothing to do with legal rights or ability. Federal and state laws prohibit discrimination in employment, availability of housing, rates of pay, right to promotion, educational opportunity, civil rights, and use of facilities based on race, nationality, creed, color, age, sex or sexual orientation. The rights to protest discrimination or enforce one’s rights to equal treatment are provided in various federal and state laws, which allow for private lawsuits with the right to damages. There are also federal and state commissions to investigate and enforce equal rights. (2)
Endorse	To pledge support to a program, proposal or candidate (2)
Gender	A psychological phenomenon that refers to learned sex-related behaviors and attitudes of males and females (3)
Gender bias	Unequal treatment in employment opportunity (such as promotion, pay, benefits and privileges), and expectations due to attitudes based on the sex of an employee or group of employees. Gender bias can be a legitimate basis for a lawsuit under anti-discrimination statutes. (2)
Gender expression	The way a person communicates gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice or body characteristics (3)
Gender identity	One’s sense of maleness and femaleness; usually includes awareness and acceptance of one’s biological sex*** refers to a person’s internal sense of being male, female or something else (3)
Gender roles	Sets of behaviors and attitudes associated by society with being male or female and expressed publicly by the individual (3)
Harassment	Systematic and/or continued unwanted and annoying actions of one party or group, including threats and demands; the purpose may include racial prejudice, personal malice, an attempt to force someone to quit a job or grant sexual favors
Injunction	A court order preventing one or more named parties from taking some action. A preliminary injunction often is issued to allow fact-finding, so a judge can determine whether a permanent injunction is justified. (1)
Opinion	A judge’s written explanation of the decision of the court. Because a case may be heard by three or more judges in the court of appeals, the opinion in appellate decisions can take several forms. If all the judges completely agree on the result, one judge will write the opinion for all. If all the judges do not agree, the formal decision will be based upon the view of the majority, and one member of the

	majority will write the opinion. The judges who did not agree with the majority may write separately in dissenting or concurring opinions to present their views. (1)
Rescind	To cancel a contract, putting the parties back to the position as if the contract had not existed. Both parties rescind a contract by mutual agreement, since a unilateral cancellation of a contract is a "breach" of the contract and could result in a lawsuit by the non-cancelling party. (2)
Transgender	An umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. (3)
	SOURCES: U.S. Courts Glossary of Legal Terms (1); Legal Terms and Definitions (2); Glossary of Psychological Terms (3)

ANSWERS. Letter to a Patron.

1. It is important to thank a patron in order to show that your organization values their contribution and/or service to you.
2. This letter helps HCHS Habitat for Humanity club because it shows that the organization cares about its projects, and it states details about the organization's stewardship of funds. The recipient may be willing to donate to future projects and tell others of the group's activities. This letter helps Mr. Lee because it provides him with written recognition for his donation and invites him to the event. Therefore, it is dually a thank you note and an invitation.
3. The tone of this letter is candid, formal, and informational. Camille uses professional language to sincerely express her thanks to Mr. Lee and provide him with more information about HCHS Habitat for Humanity, the summer trip, and the luncheon.
4. Answers will vary.

More Resources for This Guide

- [Bullies](#)
- [The Citizen's Voice](#)
- [Discipline & Decalogue in the Schools](#)

District of Columbia Public Schools Academic Content Standards

The District of Columbia has adopted the Common Core State Standards in reading and mathematics. In addition, DCPS has adopted new learning standards in arts, health and physical education, science, social studies, technology and world languages.

Health. 3-5.3.1.5. Define sexual orientation and gender identity and describe the difference between the two. (Grade 5. Category 3: Human Body and Personal Health)

Health. 6-8.3.1.3. Differentiate between gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and sex assigned at birth-biological sex. (Grade 8, Category 3: Human Body and Personal Health.)

Health. 9-12.3.8.26. Evaluate school policies, programs, and trainings (including those for school staff for the promotion of dignity, respect and safety for all students, including all genders, sexual orientations, gender identities, cultures, religions, races and ethnicities. (By Grade 12, Category 3, Advocacy)

Academic Content Standards may be found at <http://osse.dc.gov/service/dc-educational-standards>.

Maryland Academic Content Standards

United States History, Standard 5. Students will demonstrate understanding of the cultural, economic, political and social developments from 1981 to the present (Expectation 6). 1. Analyze modern economic, political and social influences on American society from 1981-present. (Indicator 2)

Health. Students will demonstrate the ability to use mental and emotional health knowledge, skills and strategies to enhance wellness. Apply the decision-making process to personal issues and problems (Indicator 1)

Objectives:

- a. Demonstrate the ability to utilize strategies when making decisions related to health needs and risks of young adults.
- b. Analyze health concerns that require collaborative decision-making.
- c. Predict immediate and long-term impact of health decisions on the individual, family, and community.
- d. Apply strategies and skills needed to attain personal health goals.
- e. Formulate an effective plan for lifelong health.

The Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum Content Standards can be found online at <http://mdk12.org/assessments/standards/9-12.html>

Virginia Academic Content Standards

Health. The student will identify and explain essential health concepts to demonstrate an understanding of personal health.

- q) Analyze the role of tolerance and resilience in coping with stress.
- r) Explain the impact of failing to recognize issues related to emotional and mental health.
- s) Explain why seeking help for mental health issues is important.
- u) Explain how individual, social, and cultural differences may increase vulnerability to bullying. (Essential Health Concepts 8.1)

Health. The student will undertake health-promotion activities that demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between nutrition, physical activity, and emotional and physical health.

- k) Describe healthy ways to handle the emotional, psychological, and physical consequences of stress.
- m) Justify and encourage safe, respectful, and responsible relationships.
- n) Identify resources for helping someone who is exhibiting self-harming behaviors.
- o) Create strategies for helping others prevent or get help with bullying.
- p) Analyze opportunities for community service.
- q) Create environmental design solutions that promote physical and psychological health. (Advocacy and Health Promotion 8.3)

Virginia, U.S. History: The student will demonstrate economic, social, cultural and political developments in recent decades and today (VUS.15)

Academic Content Standards may be found at <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/index.shtml>.

Common Core Standards

English Language Arts/Informational Text. Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.3)

English Language Arts/Reading Informational Text. Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6](#))

English Language Arts/Anchor Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. ([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7](#))

Common Core standards may be found at www.corestandards.org.