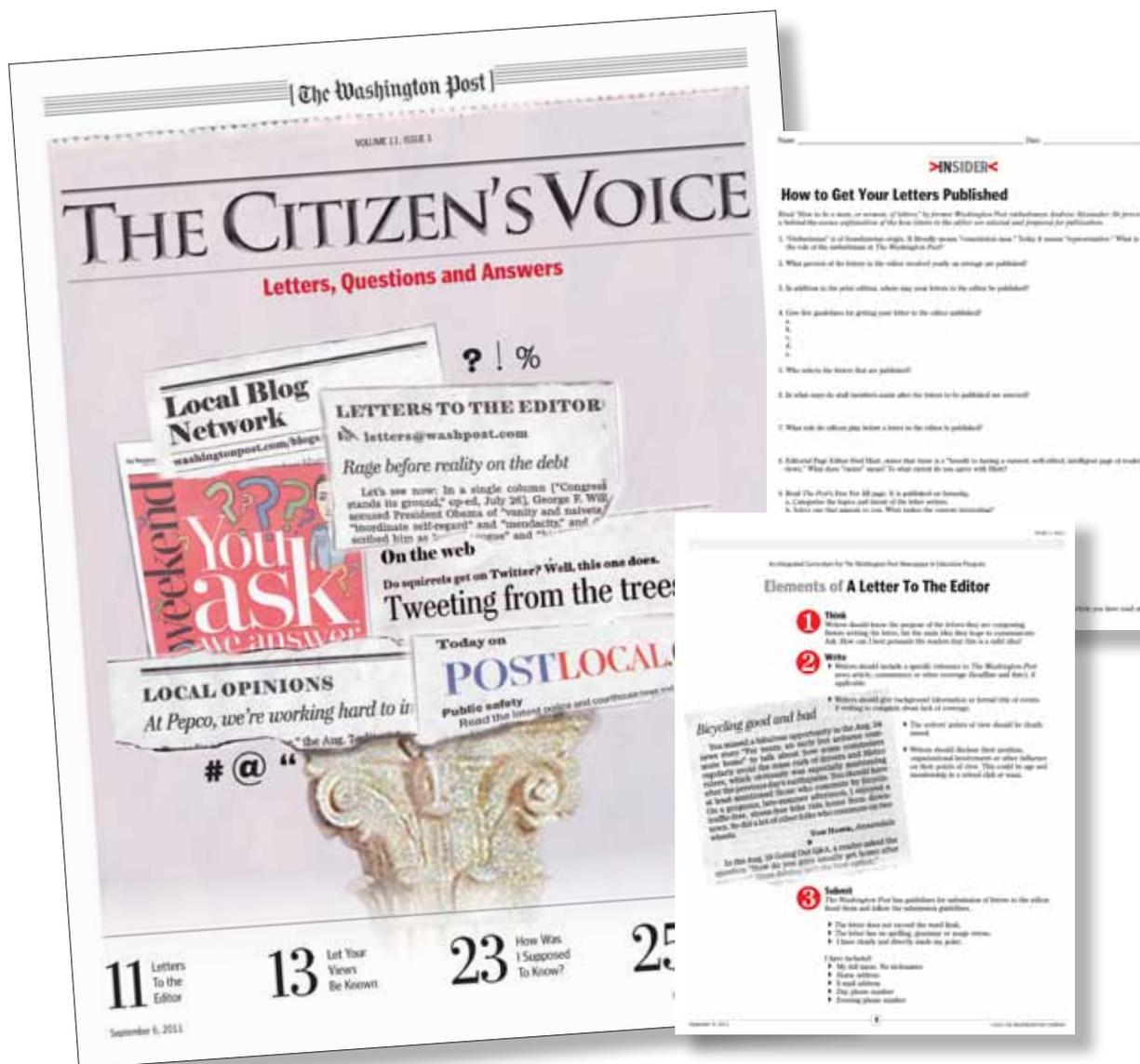


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Letters Take Many Forms



- Word Study: A Word About Epistles, Communiqués and Letters
- Student Activity: Dialogue in Writing with *The Post*
- Post Reprint: “The touching letter the Bush twins wrote to Sasha and Malia Obama about being first daughters”
- Post Reprint: “The letter I had to write to my child’s teacher”
- Student Activity: Excerpts Add Depth

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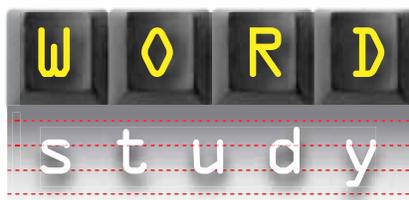
We begin this examination of letters with “Word Study: From Epistle to Letter.” This etymology activity moves students from technology, across languages and through types of letters — epistles, missives, literature and dispatches. The activity concludes with consideration of epistolary novels from the 18th Century to today.

Letters to the editor appear daily in *The Washington Post* in print and online. “Dialogue in Writing with The Post” provides information on submitting a letter to the editor and additional sections of the newspaper where readers can send letters of inquiry and interact with reporters and columnists.



Two letters are reprinted from the pages of *The Post*. One involves personal communication from and to presidential children. The other writer explains why she had to write a letter. They can be read and discussed on their own merit, compared for style and purpose, and used as models. They are also available to be used with “Excerpts Add Depth” activity.

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A Word About Epistles, Communiqués and Letters

Not so long ago, movable metal type was set letter by letter to create words, sentences and paragraphs in a “form.” The capital letters were kept in the top or upper case. The typesetter would reach into the lower case for all other letters. This method was quite an improvement over quills and chisels. Yet it is far more cumbersome than today’s use of computers and smart phones.

The letters that form our alphabet were formed over the centuries to convey sound and meaning. In Latin, *littera* and *litera* were the words to convey these symbols as well as to mean an “epistle,” “document,” “literature” and “great books.” The Old French *lettre* meant “character,” “letter” or “missive”; its plural meant “literature,” “writing” and “learning.”

The German word *Buchstabe* meaning “letter, character” became *bocstaef* in Old English. The close relation of books and letters is seen today in such phrases as “man of letters” to describe someone devoted to literary or scholarly pursuits and someone described as “bookish” habitually reads books and loves literary pursuits.

Letters provide communication from one person to another, one group to another, or leaders to the public. Various words define types and purposes of letters. A communiqué is an official announcement or statement, especially one made to the press or media. A dispatch is an official message or news report. A memorandum can be short or long, but is more formal than a note. A missive is a written message from an official source or a letter meant to sound authoritative.

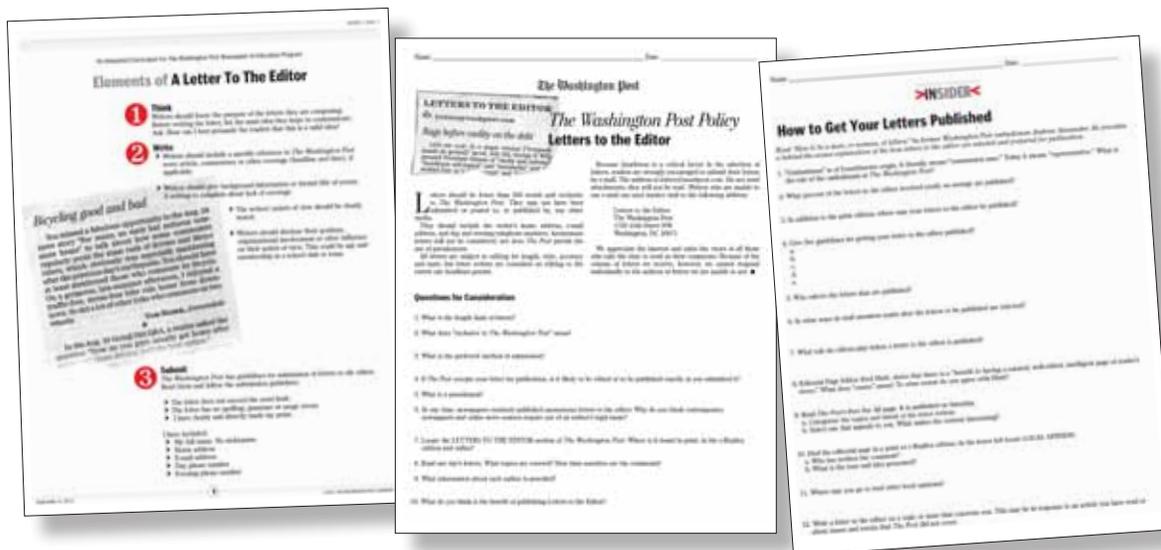
“Epistle” is also a word that has kept its meaning over centuries. It is found in Old English, by way of Latin from the Greek word *epistolē*, “a letter”; from *epistellein* meaning “send news,” or *epistello*, “to send to.” These are formed from *epi*, meaning “upon, in addition” + *stellein*, meaning “send.” The word was reintroduced in Middle English from Old French.

When epistle is spelled with a lower case “e,” it means a formal or elegant letter or a composition in the form of a letter. When the upper case is used, it is one of the letters adopted as books of the New Testament.

Twenty-one Epistles (written primarily by the Apostle Paul — the Pauline Epistles, John, Peter and others) compose a large portion of the New Testament. This is a distinction of the scripture of Christianity. Letters are also referenced in the Old Testament. For example, King Ahasuerus (in the Book of Esther) sends royal letters on the swiftest horses. Among the other references is Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles in Babylon.

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Dialogue in Writing with *The Post*



The Washington Post offers opportunities to comment on issues, to respond to *Post* print and online content and to seek answers to your questions. Begin the dialogue with *The Washington Post* staff and *Post* readers at one of these addresses.

Letters to the Editor

Submit a Letter to the Editor briefly online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/letter-to-the-editor/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.48e23f3d500f or send email to letters@washpost.com.

Letters to the Editor may be found online at www.washingtonpost.com/localopinions.

Each year, *The Post's* letters editor receives and reads thousands of letters to the editor. Letter writers respond to *Post* news articles and opinions, and often take the newspaper to task for how it operates. “Our favorite letters to the editor of 2016” is a selection of the novel, thoughtful and funny insights that readers submitted to *The Post* this year, sorted by the date they appeared in print and subject matter. Many of the letters are part of packages on the same topic — click on the headline to read more perspectives.

“Our favorite letters to the editor of 2016”
(originally published December 30, 2016)

https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/12/30/our-favorite-letters-to-the-editor-of-2016/?utm_term=.1d76e6981555

Corrections

The Washington Post is committed to correcting errors that appear in the newspaper.

Email: corrections@washpost.com. Cell: 202-334-6000, ask to be connected to the desk involved — National, Foreign, Metro, Style, Sports, Business or any of the weekly sections.

The Washington Post readers are welcome to write to reporters and columnists whose e-mail addresses are found at the end of articles. Because of the volume of e-mails do not expect a personal response. Below are a few of the current ways to communicate with *The Washington Post* staff.

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Ask Amy

To seek advice write askamy@amydickinson.com or Amy Dickinson, Tribune Content Agency, 16650 Westgrove Dr., Suite 175, Addison, Texas 75001.

Caroline Hax

You may seek advice at tellme@washpost.com.

The Color of Money

Readers can send questions to Michelle Singletary, *The Washington Post*, 1301 K Street NW, Washington, DC 20071, or e-mail her at singletarym@washpost.com.

Couch Slouch

Norman Chad encourages readers of his Sports column to enter the \$1.25 Ask The Slouch Cash Giveaway. Email asktheslouch@aol.com. If your question is used, you win \$1.25 in cash.

Faith and Religion

Throughout the week, visit washingtonpost.com/onfaith for commentary, reading suggestions, online forum and news about faith and religion.

Dr. Gridlock

Find answers to your questions about Metro, traffic throughout the region and other transportation issues. Submit questions online at: <https://live.washingtonpost.com/gridlock0306.html>

Health & Science

This Tuesday section may be reached at health-science@washpost.com.

John Kelly's Washington

Have a question about buildings, streets, people past and present in D.C.? Send it to find the answer at john.kelly@washpost.com.

KidsPost

Parents may send information and photographs to have their children's birthdays appear on Mondays birthday section: kidspost.com or mails to KidsPost, *The Washington Post*, 1301 K St. NW, Washington,

DC 20071.

To become a Class of KidsPost, teachers need to fill out an online form: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/r/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2016/09/01/KidsPost/Images/ClassofKidsPost2016new.pdf>

Students ages 5-13 may submit weather-related artwork for potential publication to: <https://sub.washingtonpost.com/hosted/54d2568ad33f062f0e5d3668>

Live Chats and Q&A

<https://live.washingtonpost.com>

Live chats allow you to join the conversation live or to search through previous chats to peruse the discussion topics. Regular Chats are scheduled as well as ones with special guests and topics. The posted schedule for the week with times can help you plan.

Monday

- Ask Boswell: Sports columnist Tom Boswell
- Dr. Gridlock
- Talk About Travel: Section editors and writers

Tuesday

- Chatological Humor: Columnist and feature writer Gene Weingarten
- Compost Live: Columnist Alexandra Petri
- Eugene Robinson Live: Post columnist answers questions about recent topics
- Civilities: Columnist Steven Petrow discuss etiquette

Wednesday

- Ask Tom: Food critic Tom Sietsema, 11 a.m. ET
- Free Range on Food
- Reliable Source: Columnist Roxanne Roberts

Thursday

- Tracee Hamilton: Local and national sports
- What to Watch: Hank Stuever about the good, bad and ugly of TV
- Got Plans?: The Going Out Guide staff
- Color of Money: Michelle Singletary

Friday

- Noon — Advice columnist Carolyn Hax
- Real Wheels Live: Columnist Warren Brown chats about car buying and the auto industry

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The touching letter the Bush twins wrote to Sasha and Malia Obama about being first daughters

BY KATIE METTLER

• Originally Published January 13, 2017

In 2009, as their father penned a letter to his successor, the twin daughters of President George W. Bush, Jenna and Barbara, wrote a letter of their own.

Their dad's letter would be confidential and offer advice, tucked away in the top drawer of the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office, where incoming President Barack Obama would find it on his first day of work as leader of the free world. Now a White House tradition, this had been done by every sitting president since Ronald Reagan.

And so as their father prepared to pass the torch, the Bush girls decided they had advice to offer, too — not for the new president, but for his young daughters, Sasha and Malia.

From one pair of first daughters to another, they titled it “Playing House in the White House.”

Barbara and Jenna, then 27 years old, told Sasha, 7, and Malia, 10, to surround themselves with “loyal friends,” to cherish their pets in times when they'd need “the quiet comfort that only animals can provide,” to slide down the banister

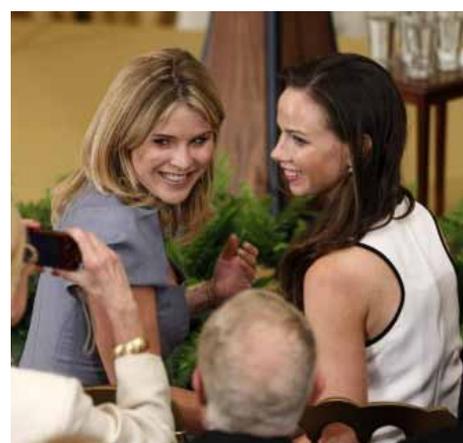


JAE C. HONG/AP; PETE SOUZA / WHITEHOUSE.GOV

Obamas celebrate red, white and blue for the Fourth of July in 2008. Right, in an official family portrait in 2011, for their holiday card.

“We have watched you grow from girls to impressive young women with grace and ease. And through it all you had each other. Just like we did.”

—Jenna and Barbara



GEORGE W. BUSH PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

President George W. Bush's daughters at his swearing-in ceremony in 2005. Right, Jenna and Barbara, have their photo taken in the East Room at the White House in May 2012.

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of the solarium and play sardines on the White House lawn.

Most importantly, they said, “remember who your dad really is.”

Eight years later, with just a week until Sasha and Malia leave the White House, the Bush sisters, now 35, have written a second letter — this time with advice not about living inside the White House, but outside of it.

“We have watched you grow from girls to impressive young women with grace and ease. And through it all you had each other. Just like we did,” they wrote in the letter, published first online by *Time* magazine. “Now you are about to join another rarified club, one of former First Children — a position you didn’t seek and one with no guidelines. But you have so much to look forward to. You will be writing the story of your lives, beyond the shadow of your famous parents, yet you will always carry with you the experiences of the past eight years.

Americans have an odd fascination with the idea of first daughters. It has inspired a handful of popular movie narratives — Katie Holmes’s *First Daughter*, the Disney classic *My Date with the President’s Daughter* and *Chasing Liberty* starring Mandy Moore — and was a major plotline in Aaron Sorkin’s popular TV series *The West Wing*, which often wove in the fictional president’s complicated relationship with his three daughters.

The scrutiny these fictional first daughters faced is not unlike the pressure the real ones encounter,



and for the past quarter-century, Americans have had only female first children in the White House — Chelsea Clinton, the Bush twins, Malia and Sasha Obama.

And perhaps no first children were confronted with the harsh reality of having a dad in chief as much as Jenna and Barbara Bush, whose father was in the White House during their college years and whose antics with underage drinking drew intense publicity.

The sisters made note of that in their letter to the Obama sisters.

“Enjoy college. As most of the world knows, we did,” they wrote. “And you won’t have the weight of the world on your young shoulders anymore.”

In 2014, a Hill staffer for a Republican congressman resigned amid widespread backlash after she criticized on social media the appearance of Sasha and Malia during the televised traditional turkey pardon on Thanksgiving. “Dear Sasha and Malia, I get you’re both in those awful teen years, but you’re a part of the First Family, try showing a little class,” the staffer wrote at the

time. “Rise to the occasion. Act like being in the White House matters to you. Dress like you deserve respect, not a spot at a bar.”

Jenna Bush Hager, who kept her family name after she was married, defended the Obama girls after the incident, saying she felt “fiercely protective of them.”

That sentiment was obvious in the letter she and her sister penned Thursday.

The Bush twins encouraged Malia and Sasha to keep in contact with the people that made their stay in the White House feel normal, including their Secret Service agents, and challenged them to use their political and diplomatic experiences as first daughters for the greater good.

“You have lived through the unbelievable pressure of the White House,” they closed the letter. “You have listened to harsh criticism of your parents by people who had never even met them. You stood by as your precious parents were reduced to headlines. Your parents, who put you first and who not only showed you but gave you the world.

“As always, they will be rooting for you as you begin your next chapter. And so will we.”

Jenna Bush Hager is a correspondent for the *Today* show on NBC and her sister, Barbara, is the chief executive and co-founder of Global Health Corps, a nonprofit organization focused on the global health equity movement.

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Two daughters of President George W. Bush wrote a letter to the daughters of President Barack Obama, as the Obama administration was concluding. You can read their letter to the Obama sisters here.



Malia and Sasha, eight years ago on a cold November day, we greeted you on the steps of the White House. We saw both the light and wariness in your eyes as you gazed at your new home. We left our jobs in Baltimore and New York early and traveled to Washington to show you around. To show you the Lincoln Bedroom, and the bedrooms that were once ours, to introduce you to all the people — the florists, the grounds-keepers and the butlers — who dedicate themselves to making this historic house a home. The four of us wandered the majestic halls of the house you had no choice but to move in to. When you slid down the banister of the solarium, just as we had done as 8-year-olds and again as 20-year-olds chasing our youth, your joy and laughter were contagious.

In eight years, you have done so much. Seen so much. You stood at the gates of the Robben Island cell where South Africa's Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for decades, your arms around your father. You traveled to Liberia and Morocco with your mom to talk with girls about the importance of education — girls who saw themselves in you, saw themselves in your parents, saw who they could become if they continued to study and learn. You attended state dinners, hiked in national parks, met

international leaders and managed to laugh at your dad's jokes during the annual Thanksgiving turkey pardon, all while being kids, attending school and making friends. We have watched you grow from girls to impressive young women with grace and ease.

And through it all you had each other. Just like we did.

Now you are about to join another rarified club, one of former First Children — a position you didn't seek and one with no guidelines. But you have so much to look forward to. You will be writing the story of your lives, beyond the shadow of your famous parents, yet you will always carry with you the experiences of the past eight years.

Never forget the wonderful people who work at the White House. Our greeter as 7-year-olds at our grandfather's Inauguration was Nancy, the White House florist, who ushered us in from the cold. She helped us make colorful bouquets of winter flowers for our grandparents' bedside. Twenty years later, Nancy did the flowers for Jenna's wedding.

Cherish your own Nancy. We stay in touch with our Secret Service. They were part of growing up for us: there for first dates, first days and even an engagement and a honeymoon. We know it wasn't always easy — the two of you and the two of us were teenagers trailed by men in backpacks — but they put their lives on hold for us.

Enjoy college. As most of the world knows, we did. And you won't have the weight of the world on your young shoulders anymore. Explore your passions. Learn who you are. Make

mistakes — you are allowed to. Continue to surround yourself with loyal friends who know you, adore you and will fiercely protect you. Those who judge you don't love you, and their voices shouldn't hold weight. Rather, it's your own hearts that matter.

Take all that you have seen, the people you have met, the lessons you have learned, and let that help guide you in making positive change. We have no doubt you will. Traveling with our parents taught us more than any class could. It opened our eyes to new people as well as new cultures and ideas. We met factory workers in Michigan, teachers in California, doctors healing people on the Burmese border, kids who lined the dusty streets of Kampala to see the American President, and kids with HIV waiting to get the antiretroviral drugs that would save their lives. One tiny girl wearing her finest lavender dress looked young, which she was not. She was little because she was sick. Her mom admitted that she might not live to see these drugs work, but her brothers and sisters would. After meeting this girl, Barbara went back to school and changed her major, and her life's path.

You have lived through the unbelievable pressure of the White House. You have listened to harsh criticism of your parents by people who had never even met them. You stood by as your precious parents were reduced to headlines. Your parents, who put you first and who not only showed you but gave you the world. As always, they will be rooting for you as you begin your next chapter. And so will we.

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The letter I had to write to my child's teacher

BY KIM MOWER

• Originally Published January 24, 2017

I was only in the classroom for 45 minutes, but that was long enough to compel me to write a letter to the teacher once I left.

I'll be honest, I have zero qualifications as it relates to child education. My only qualification and reason for being in a kindergarten class that day is my oldest child is a kindergartner. He attends a public school and I was in his classroom as a parent volunteer.

His teacher had asked parents to sign up to help during the daily Literacy Center portion of the morning. I was excited to go in, see my son in his classroom, and meet his classmates. When I arrived, the class was sitting on the floor, singing, and drawing the alphabet in the air with their fingers. Mrs. G gave me a quick rundown on how I was to help. She introduced me to the class and then quietly asked the children to go to their first center.

They all scattered about. How they knew where to go, I have no idea. Yet each of them bee-lined for specific centers. Mrs. G worked with a small group off to the side while I was charged with making sure the remaining students at three other centers were doing okay. In one area, students chose books from the classroom library and read to



STOCK IMAGE

themselves, each other, or had me read aloud. The second center was an alphabet game that required turn-taking and letter sounds. I was to mediate the game if they needed help. The third center was a station of computers and tablets that the kids were to log on to and play letter games.

There was a lot going on. There was coughing (so much coughing, so little mouth covering). There was shoe tying. There was making sure Ava, Asher, Jack, Jackson, Luke and Lucy pronounced U, Y, W, Q, K, C correctly (impossible to explain the differences). There was reading a book about butterflies, while helping someone else sound out a word, while tying another shoe. There was figuring out how to get back to the home screen; explaining the greater-

than and less-than symbols. Then it was time to switch centers and start all over with different kids playing the game, different kids reading books, different kids needing to log on the computer.

Most everyone knew just what was expected of them and moved between centers with ease when prompted by the teacher. Considering I can't get my three children to move from the living room to the kitchen for dinner I was impressed how the teacher had managed to get so many children to independently move and start up a different task.

And although I was smiling, I was also spinning on the inside. So many moving parts and so many little moving bodies. So much talking and questions and coughing and laughing. And yet, it wasn't chaos. This was

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controlled, but I was overwhelmed. Giving attention to so many kids left me drained. How could a teacher do this every day?

Dear Mrs. G,

It's been more than a few decades since I've spent any length of time in an elementary school classroom. After volunteering for Literacy Centers today I left feeling exhausted and impressed. Exhausted because a few dozen 5-6-year-olds are no joke. Impressed because a few dozen 5-6-year-olds knew exactly what was expected of them and moved around appropriately without more than simple prompts. All the kids were enjoying learning; and though I was there to assist, it appeared that for the most part these children functioned independently and lead themselves in the centers. That's impressive for humans who can't yet tie their own shoes and still need to be reminded to share.

Thank you for your hard work. It's work I could never do let alone do so well. I appreciate your gift and feel lucky that my son has you as a teacher.

Many teachers won't be shocked to hear how this classroom operated; I'm sure lots of classrooms run by great teachers operate similarly. However, I think many parents like myself have no clue what the day is like in their child's classroom, the moving parts of coordinating children of varying levels of ability with varying levels of opinions and responsiveness. I encourage anyone who has the opportunity to participate in their child's classroom to do so. See and feel what it is like to be in a classroom.

As schools everywhere approach the 100th day of school, I hope

parents find the two minutes it takes to jot a quick note to your child's teacher, an adult who has spent 100 days with your child, teaching, coordinating, coaching. Express appreciation. Report back what your child has learned that has impressed you. Say thank you.

My 45 minutes were up. All the children had rotated through the four centers and were heading back to their seats. There was never an announcement to do this yet they were zigzagging around like ants in the dirt. My son, whom I had asked seven times that morning to go brush his teeth, hadn't even been told to put

his folder away but there he was, like the 16 other kids, putting his folder in a box.

Frazzled, I took this as my cue to leave. I hugged my son and said goodbye to the class and practically sprinted out the door. After I left I had no other choice but to write a letter to the teacher.

Kim Mower is a writer and mom to three young children. A sampling of her work can be found on kimmower.com. Follow her on Facebook at [A Housewife Writes](https://www.facebook.com/AHousewifeWrites). Sometimes she tweets @a_housewife but most of her day is spent caring for her children, who demand things like food and attention.

