

Writing Formal and Informal Letters — Grade Three

Ohio Standards Connections

Writing Applications

Benchmark C

Write formal and informal letters that include important details and follow correct letter format.

(Grades 3 - 4)

Indicator 3

Write formal and informal letters (e.g., thank you notes, letters of request) that include relevant information and date, proper salutation, body, closing and signature.

(Grade 3)

Lesson Summary:

Students will write a thank-you note and a formal letter of request that includes relevant information, such as a return address (use the address of the school), date, inside address (address of person receiving the letter), proper salutation, body, closing and signature.

Estimated Duration: 60-90 minutes.

Commentary:

In this age of advanced electronic communications, composing a well-crafted letter is no less important than it was long ago. We still depend on letters as a means of communicating our political, consumer, family or romantic interests. Yet, the purposefulness of letter writing extends even further. Letter writing is a bridge to essay writing, and the composition of memos is something of a hybrid of the two.

Letters and memos will frequently make a case, express a point of view, register an opinion or profess a need. Their purpose often calls upon the writer to display precision and conciseness of language indispensable to communication across a variety of forums. This lesson uses literature as a springboard for letter writing. Depending on the kind of literature used, it is also a springboard with options.

While this lesson has a primary focus and requires a significant investment of preparatory work, the strategies used – discussions, brainstorming, appeals to imagination and creativity and the use of the five-step writing process – transcend the grade level. Where fairytales serve as the springboard, other real world situations may be substituted. School based controversies stemming from playground bullying or moving ahead in line at the water fountain or in the cafeteria may be considered. Other school based occasions like a classmate who moves away, a newly enrolled student or a birthday are also relevant topics. Each of these singular "real world" purposes or any wider purposes embedded in a social studies or science unit provide young writers with an opportunity to write a letter or memo and practice developing skills that can be transferred to more sophisticated forms of writing.

Pre-Assessment:

Using correct letter format, the student will write a letter of request to an imaginary animal shelter, asking for information about fostering a pet.

Scoring Guidelines:

3 = writes a letter with the return address, date, inside address, proper salutation, body, closing and signature. The body of the letter clearly states the intended message and includes important details.

2 = writes a letter with five of the seven parts of a complete letter and clearly states the intended message.

1 = writes a letter with two to four parts present and the message is adequately

Other Related Ohio Standards

Writing Process

Benchmark A

Generate ideas and determine a topic suitable for writing.
(Grades 3 - 4)

Indicator 1

Generate writing ideas through discussions with others and from printed material.
(Grade 3)

Indicator 2

Develop a clear main idea for writing.
(Grade 3)

Benchmark B

Determine audience and purpose for self-selected and assigned writing tasks.
(Grades 3 - 4)

Indicator 3

Develop a purpose and audience for writing.
(Grade 3)

stated.

0 = demonstrates little or no understanding of how to write a formal letter.

Post-Assessment:

Using correct letter format, the student will write an imaginary letter to fairytale characters, asking them to grant a wish, reveal a secret, become a friend, etc.

Scoring Guidelines:

3 = writes a complete letter with the return address, date, inside address, proper salutation, body, closing and signature. The body of the letter clearly states the intended message and includes important details.

2 = writes a letter with five of the seven parts of a complete letter and clearly states the intended message.

1 = writes a letter with two to four parts present and the message is adequately stated.

0 = demonstrates little or no understanding of how to write a formal letter.

Instructional Procedures:

1. Engage the class in a discussion of why people write letters.
2. Read and discuss with the class, *The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters* by Janet and Allan Ahlberg.
3. Tell the class that each student will write a thank-you note to and from fairytale characters.
4. With the class, brainstorm ideas for this thank-you note.
5. Choose a character to write to and model a letter on chart paper, using the students' ideas and showing proper format - return address, date, inside address, proper salutation, body, closing and signature.
6. Tell students to be thinking of the characters they would like to use in their own notes.
7. During the next class, review the letter on chart paper, discussing content and format for a thank-you note. Give students paper on which to write their rough drafts.
8. After notes have been written, have students work with a partner. As they offer each other suggestions for improvement, circulate among the students offering them suggestions as well.
9. Have students proofread their notes with you or an assistant, making changes and corrections if necessary.
10. Instruct students how to address an envelope, and show an example, using imaginary fairytale addresses.
11. Have students copy their notes onto note cards and address envelopes.
12. Have students share notes with the class and put them in an area in the room to be read by others.

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13. In another class, ask students for reasons why people would write letters of request.
14. Tell students that they will be writing letters of request using fairytale characters.
15. Brainstorm ideas for their letters.
16. Choose a character to write to and model a formal letter on chart paper, using the students' ideas and following proper format. Be sure to include the return address, date, inside address, proper salutation, body, closing and signature. Instruct students to be thinking of the character and the request(s) they will have in their own letters.
17. In the last class, review the letter on chart paper, discussing content and format for a formal letter. Give students paper on which to write their rough drafts.
18. Using the same procedures as with the thank-you note, have students work with partners for feedback, proofread letters with an adult, fold letters properly and review how to address the envelope and insert the letter correctly.
19. Have students copy their letters onto stationery and address their envelopes using a return address and an inside address.
20. Have students share their letters with the class and display them in an area where others can read them.

Differentiated Instructional Support:

Instruction is differentiated according to learner needs, to help all learners either meet the intent of the specified indicator(s) or, if the indicator is already met, to advance beyond the specified indicator(s).

- For the student having trouble with the format or composition of the letters, provide a scribe.
- For the student having trouble thinking through the process, provide individual assistance.
- For the student having difficulty using descriptive words due to a spelling problem, use the word wall and/or class lists of descriptive words previously studied.
- For the student who has mastered letter-writing skills, he or she can search Web sites for favorite authors and email letters to them, asking for information about them.

Extension:

These are ideas for all students to continue learning on this topic – in class or outside of class.

- A field trip to the U.S. Post Office can lead to discussions and understandings about the postal system and the process a letter goes through before it gets delivered.
- Students can be encouraged to write thank-you notes to various people who have assisted with classroom activities.
- Students can write letters of request through email or conventional mail,

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asking for information that will help in classroom units or individual units of study.

Homework Options and Home Connections:

Students can search for resources then write a letter requesting information related to current classroom or individual units of study.

Interdisciplinary Connections:

Students can design stamps for the envelopes and make stationery in art class.

Materials/Resources Needed:

For the teacher: *The Jolly Postman or Other People's Letters* by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, chart paper, markers.

For the students: Paper for rough drafts, pencils, note cards, stationery and envelopes.

Key Vocabulary:

- return address
- date
- inside address
- salutation
- body
- closing
- signature
- stationery

General Tips:

Teachers may want to consider alternative texts for this lesson. Some other possibilities are: *Dear Annie* by Judith Caseley; *Dear Mr. Blueberry* by Simon James; *Messages in the Mailbox: How to Write a Letter* by Loreen Leedy; *Yours Truly, Goldilocks* by Alma Flor Ada and Leslie Tryon; or *With Love, Little Red Hen* by Leslie Tryon.