

HOW TO WRITE A LETTER

Lesson Plan prepared by Toronto's First Post Office

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Back in the 1830s, Toronto's First Post Office was an essential service in the Town of York. It facilitated communication with friends and family, and served as a community hub keeping people informed of local events and news.

These days, though methods of communication have greatly evolved, writing letters is still a great way to stay connected with others. Despite the prevalence of emails and text messages, letter writing remains an essential skill. By learning how to properly write and structure letters, students will improve their communication, social, and handwriting skills.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify the elements of a letter
2. Apply these elements to compose and mail a complete letter
3. Communicate by writing effectively and with confidence
4. Use writing to interact and connect with individuals and communities, for personal growth, and for active participation as world citizens

CURRICULUM TIE-INS

- Languages, Writing, Grades 3-8, 2006.
- Social Studies, Grades 1-6; History and Geography, Grades 7-8, 2018.

The theme and content of these letters can be adapted to reflect current course topics.

LENGTH

1 hour

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Following handouts:
 - [Template](#) (PDF)
 - [Draft](#) (PDF)
 - [Checklist](#) (PDF)
 - [Brainstorm](#) (PDF)
 - [Prompts](#) (PDF)
2. Pencil or Pen
3. Lined paper or stationery
4. Envelope
5. Stamps
6. Coloured markers (optional)
7. Chalkboard and chalk (optional)

KEY VOCABULARY

- Heading
- Greeting
- Body
- Closing
- Signature
- Postscript
- Postage Stamp

VERIFICATION

Introduce the joy of letter-writing. Ask your students to raise their hands if they have ever received a personal letter and how they felt when they received it. Use these questions to encourage discussion:

- What was the purpose of the letter (holiday card, thank-you letter, ask letter)?
- What was on your mind as you read the letter?
- Did you keep the letter to read again?
- Did you share your letter with anyone?
- Did you write back?

ACTIVITY

1. Together, read over the Letter Component hand-out and explain the 5 components of the letter.

- *Option 1:* As you go over the template, ask students for examples of what could be included in each component.
 - Greetings: Dear, Hello, Good morning, Hi, etc.
 - Closing: Goodbye, Love, Sincerely, Best, etc
- *Option 2 (Advanced):* Have students read over a selection of letters from Toronto's First Post Office's Archival Collection. Ask them to highlight the following fields (you can write these on the chalkboard for their reference) then review together.
 - HEADING - Red
 - GREETING - Blue
 - BODY - Green
 - CLOSING - Yellow
 - SIGNATURE - Purple
 - POSTSCRIPT (if applicable)- Pink

2. Assign a letter theme.

- *Option 1:* Assign a theme.
 - Encourage kids to write to a specific person, such as their parents on Mother's Day and Father's Day, or to grandparents on Grandparents' Day.
 - Letter Writing Prompts
- *Option 2 (Advanced):* Ask students to fill out the Letter Writing Brainstorm Worksheet. This template will help shape the theme and content of the letter, and determine who they will mail it to.

3. Using the Letter Draft Template or a lined sheet of paper, ask the students to write a draft of a letter. Make sure they verify that every letter component is included, and that they check for spelling errors. Proof-reading is essential. Don't forget to ask the person they're writing to to write back!

4. Get them to copy their final letter on a clean sheet of paper. They can decorate the page or add a drawing if they wish.

5. Fold, seal, and place a stamp on the envelope. Not sure if it's ready to be mailed? Use this checklist to make sure.

Extensions

- Compare today's letter writing practices with how mail was sent in the 1830s. What is different/what is the same?
- Choose a historical figure to write to. What do you want to tell them? What do you wish they had known?
- Explore the evolution of communication methods. Make a list of all the communication methods you use today to keep in touch with friends and family. Compare answers with this list.
- Do your students have friends or family that live in a different city, province, or country? Encourage them to locate these places on a map. Ask them:
 - How far away are these places from where you live?
 - What might be similar or different about life in these places compared to where you live?
 - Share what you like about your city or country in a letter and ask them to write back about their own country.

