

Write a Letter to a U.S. Senator

Rationale: The right to petition the government is guaranteed by the first amendment and plays a critical role in the function of government. Students will be using The Olive Branch as a springboard to research and advocate for an issue to their U.S. Senator.

Objectives: This lesson will teach students how to advocate in a representative government and speak up for those with no voice. Students will also learn how the internet could be used as a source for learning about the world.

Standards:

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1**

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2**

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.3**

Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4**

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5**

Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).

Materials:

- Copies of USIP blog posts (*If you don't have access to the internet in the classroom*)
- Lined paper or computers
- Envelopes with stamps

Time: Two 45-minute classes

Assessment:

- Final letter to the Senator.

Procedures:

Step 1: Read [The Olive Branch](#), a blog from the U.S. Institute of Peace.

Step 2: Research

It is important to develop a greater understanding of the issue raised by The Olive Branch article. Have students use some of the following sources to develop a deeper understanding of the issue and collect evidence to use in their letter.

Students should then use [congress.gov](#) to see if they can find a bill regarding their topic. If a bill does exist, students are encouraged to cite it to advocate for or against the bill. This can be done with a simple key-word search.

[U.S. Bilateral Relations Factsheet](#)

[Congress.gov](#)

Step 3: Craft a letter

- Have students follow the format found in the Sample Letter to Your Senator.
- **Paragraph 1:** Who you are
- **Paragraph 2:** Why you are writing. What you read on The Olive Branch from the U.S. Institute of Peace. Be sure to cite where information comes from because it supports your argument and shows with whom you stand on the issue.
- **Paragraph 3:** Be sure to thank them for their time and request a response.

Step 4: Edit

Once the first draft is complete, allow students to edit a letter from a peer. This will allow them to learn about a different issue or a different perspective of their issue while also practicing how to edit.

Step 5: Revise

Allow students to revise their letter and be sure to read it (and grade using the rubric) and turn it back.

Step 6: Send

Provide the opportunity to put the letter in the envelope and be sure to send the letters as soon as possible. It takes time for congressional offices to go through the mail and you want to minimize the time between this assignment and an official response.

SAMPLE LETTER TO YOUR SENATOR

[U.S. Senate Mailing List](#)

The sample letter below is provided to show the correct format for addressing your U.S. Senator. Please use the left-hand column as a guide for the format, but make the letter unique to *The Olive Branch* post your student is addressing.

Return Address	Your Name Address City, State. Zip Code
Date	[Insert Date]
Senator's Address	The Honorable [Insert Senator's Name] [### Dirksen, Russell, or Hart Senate Office Building] Washington, DC 20510
Salutation	Dear Senator [Insert Last Name]:
Introduce yourself: your name, address and school to identify that you are a constituent	My name is [Insert Your Name] and I reside at [Insert Your Address] in [Insert Your City], [Insert Your State]. I am in the [Your Current Grade] at [Insert Your School].
Why are you writing your Senator?	I am writing to you in regards to an issue that came to my attention through <i>The Olive Branch</i> , a blog from the U.S. Institute of Peace. [Be specific with your suggestion, idea or request. If you are writing about a specific Bill, include the Bill Number - for example, H.R. 1797: End Neglected Tropical Diseases Act or. S. 2946: Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act of 2014]
Ask for a response	I appreciate your help and ask that you please send me a response letting me know what you intended to do on the issue at hand.
Thank your Senator for his/her time	Thank you for your time and considering my request.
Closing with your name	Sincerely, [Insert Your Name]

Rubric

	Does Not Meet Objective	Partially Meets Objective	Meets Objective	Exceeds Expectations
Formatting	Student made no attempt at following the proper formatting.	Student failed to follow the formatting by missing a section.	Student followed the formatting.	Student gave attention to detail and structured the entire letter to have a nice appearance.
Content	Student had misinformation and did not provide a strong argument.	Student included research and an appeal. Did not make it personal or push themselves.	Student included quality research and compelling appeal.	Student included a substantial amount of quality research to support their argument. They also gave a compelling appeal.
Editing and Revision Process	Student made a minimal effort to edit the work of their peers. Did not revise their own letter.	Student edited their peers work and did not revise their own letter.	Student edited their peers work and accepted the edits made by peers.	Student provided good edits for their peers and revised their work to make it better.
Points	1	2	3	4
Grade Equivalent	D	C	B	A

Sample Letter

Clara Schroepfer
3901 S. Quebec St.
Denver, CO 80237

26 May 2016

The Honorable Cory Gardner
354 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Gardner,

My name is Clara Schroepfer and I reside at 3901 South Quebec Street in Denver, Colorado. I am in the eighth grade at St. Mary's Academy.

I am writing to you in regards to an issue that came to my attention through *The Olive Branch*, a blog from the U.S. Institute of Peace. After reading about the recent issues in Ukraine, I researched the bills drafted that are related to the current situation. Joining the EU will greatly improve Ukraine's economic standpoint, as well as deter Russia from launching another attack on Ukraine. Therefore, I confidently believe that the bill H. Res. 122, or "STAND for Ukraine," is worthy of endorsement.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian people have had an extreme lack of voice in their government. Joining the EU will give the Ukrainian people the opportunity to be heard over the Russian government. Our American Constitution gives us the freedom to speak our minds. Should it not be this way for all the people in the world who wish to be heard?

I appreciate your help and ask that you please send me a response letting me know what you intended to do on the issue at hand.

Thank you for your time and considering my request.

Sincerely,
Clara M. Schroepfer