



Who can resist opening a handwritten envelope before opening any other mail? Letters are tangible objects that can communicate more considered expressions of our thoughts. Letter writing is an important life skill.

The aim of our **Creating Connection** project is to inspire curiosity and interaction, help students to improve their communication skills and promote positive relationships with the older community.

The **toolkit** has been designed to promote letter writing, stimulate your students' creativity and imagination and improve wellbeing, so that students feel heard and empowered to understand themselves and others.

Discuss as a class:

- Why do you think receiving and sending letters might still be important?
- Have you received a letter in the past?
- How did you feel? Was it handwritten? Did you let other people read it? Did you write back?
- Why do we write letters?

Writing letters

Decide who your class is writing to. Even if it is a stranger, it's helpful for the children to have someone in mind when they are writing, such as someone who is a similar age to an elderly neighbour or perhaps someone who works in their local community. If you are asking your students to write a letter to someone they have never met, it may seem a bit strange, but we all have stories to tell. The tale of a place visited, a friendship made, or an object lost or found can take on a new significance when shared with others.

Your students need to decide why they are writing the letter and what they hope to achieve by sending it. Remind your students to only reveal things that they don't mind other people knowing.

Structuring a letter:

In the opening paragraph of their letter, the student should say a little bit about themselves (such as what year they are in at school) and their reason for writing.

The body of the letter should communicate their main thoughts and the theme of the letter. It is important that what they write is interesting and entertaining so that it inspires someone to write back!

In the concluding paragraph, students should sum up their thoughts and finish by making reference to the recipient (i.e. 'I hope you've enjoyed reading my letter'). If writing to a stranger, sign off with first name only.

Remind your students to include as much detail as they can. For example, if they are writing about a family pet, they should describe what it looks like and how it makes them happy! Remember, it is often the little details in the stories we share that reveal how connected we really are.

Examples of things students could write about:

- things to be grateful for
- where you feel you belong
- what you love to do
- someone who inspires you



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- a place you have visited
- a favourite place
- your talents
- a family pet
- your hopes for the future
- a treasured object
- an important friendship
- what makes your heart sing

Receiving letters

Ask teachers, your school community - parents and grandparents - to write letters to your students so that you have a selection you can use within the classroom. Depending on what you have been teaching, you could ask students to analyse the letters, considering things such as: has the writer used the rule of three and rhetorical questions to persuade the reader or used similes and metaphors to create a vivid image?

When your class have received letters:

Ask students to read the letters in pairs or individually (should you have enough). Notice the impact receiving the letters has on them. Receiving words of wisdom can be powerful. You could write up positive and encouraging extracts of the letters and enlarge them for your classroom display.

Ask them to read the letter and:

- highlight the main features that stand out. What do you notice?
- choose the best moment (and explain why)
- describe the images that come to mind
- communicate what the writer has said
- explain your interpretation of the letter
- share one thing you will always remember about the letter
- select a single line or phrase from the letter that would most make someone else want to read it

Storytelling

Students love telling stories and inventing their own. Use the letters as a starting point for them to create characters, search for meaning in characters and weave narratives to transform their ideas. Similarly, you can ask your students to draw and create visual representations or make a freeze frame in small groups. Freeze frames are useful to communicate an idea and/or tell a story quickly without words. Once they have invented or transformed characters, ask them to physicalise them, their status and character traits. Ask your students to act out their characters and interact with other. This activity is good for teamwork, spontaneity and exploring ideas and images. Here are some ideas to spark their imagination:

Ask students to describe:

- in detail the place where the event happens
- how the main character is feeling and their character traits
- who is there and what or who else arrives - what are they like and what do they look like?
- the new character who brings an object. What it is like?
- what begins to happen
- the important message someone brings. Does it help or present an obstacle?
- the journey travelled together
- where they are going, what they see, hear, smell
- how they travel. Is it a hot air balloon, a plane, or do they take a walk?
- someone who is travelling the same path
- what is in their bag and what they have forgotten to bring
- what they can see
- the animal they meet, how it moves and if it talks
- what the animal can sense that humans cannot, e.g. vibrations, scents, sounds and colours



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- what they leave behind e.g. a message or a lost object (and who finds it?)

Values activities - generating ideas for letter writing

These ideas are designed to get your students thinking about what is important to them and to encourage collective decision making.

What are you made of? what you will need: Large pieces of paper and pens.

Place students into groups and ask a volunteer from each group to lie down on large piece of paper. The rest of the group draws an outline around them. If you do not have large paper, you could provide a figure template or ask your students to draw an outline of a figure instead. The figure is then a representation of that group.

Ask the students to write on the different body part of the figure:

- Hands and feet: your hobbies and interests
- Body: what is important to you e.g. people, places, objects and pets
- Legs: what you would like to be when you grow up
- Head: life skills and/or values to succeed in life to become a good member of their community e.g. kindness, teamwork and listening.
- Arms: what are you made of? If a flower is made of water, sunshine, oxygen and bees, then what are you made of? E.g. stardust, football, love and energy!

Ask each group to present their ideas. Make a note of the common themes in the room. As a class, they now need to decide which life values they consider the most important and why. (You could ask them to rank and prioritise them.) Students will need to apply their reasoning skills and provide explanations as to why they agree or disagree.

Provide sentence stems such as agree, build, challenge:

- I agree with _ because...
- I would like to build upon what _ is saying by adding...
- I would like to challenge what _ is saying because...

Ask students to describe:

- why they have chosen those values above others
- how they will need these values to succeed in life
- how they can be practised in the classroom, playground and at home

Tree of Life what you will need: card and paper for making the tree. Paper for leaves and leaf template. Pens for writing, scissors for cutting, tac for sticking the leaves onto the tree. Paint and brushes are optional.

This activity is about students putting their values into practice. Once you have decided on a set of class values, task your students with making a large classroom tree including the roots. Every child should draw and cut out a branch and then, in groups, they can create the trunk, roots and blank leaves.

The class values will become the roots, like kindness, empathy, respect, responsibility etc. The leaves of the tree should represent how they will practise their values e.g. be kind to their siblings, listen to each other, look after their things. Each child needs to individually write on a leaf stating how they will practise each value. The leaves can decorate the branches on the tree.



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You could initiate a class value of the week or ask the students to set challenges for other classes. They should observe each other practising these values and you could reward within your existing school systems.

Start a Society

Inspired by your class values, ask students if they could create a society (that they would want everybody to join) what would it be and why?

Write their ideas on the board. Once you have a few examples, explain as a class they will now try to democratically settle on one idea for their society.

Depending on your group, you could ask them to cast their vote with hands up or to organise a blind vote. Ask them to describe how easy or difficult the task was and what values they had to follow to reach a consensus.

Once the class have agreed a theme for their society, their task is to decide:

- why your society is important
- what message you want to communicate
- how you will spread that message
- how you want others to spread and promote the message
- what your mission statement is
- how your society is going to be different and fresh
- what the logo looks like
- how you will draw up an agreement and what that looks like

Change Makers

This activity will support and unlock change makers amongst your class and will encourage them to make a positive contribution to their school and community. Through persuasive letter writing, you can give your students the confidence to develop an argument and inspire them to work together to make a positive change and see the impact of their actions.

Place students in decision-making positions by asking them to present their concerns around issues that are important to them in their school or community. To reach an agreement, they may need to design a questionnaire to identify concerns felt by other students, draw up a petition and/or start a 'for and against' debate.

Next, explain to your students that they need to use the evidence collected to write a persuasive letter. Depending on the issue, this could be aimed at your headteacher, parents, a local councillor or MP, or the Prime Minister to attempt to bring about meaningful change.

Within their letter, students need to consider their wording, develop a logical argument and formulate their opinions.

Support students to construct their letter and make their point by providing writing tips and useful words:

In my opinion...
Furthermore...
Moreover...
For example, ...

For this reason, ...
Finally, ...
Surely...
In support of this...

I am sure that...
In addition, ...
Likewise, ...
In fact, ...



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Alliteration	the power of three starting with the same letter
Repetition	to stress a word
Emotive language	to make the reader feel emotional
Rhetorical question	asking a question that doesn't require an answer but provokes thought or discussion
Personal experience	share an experience that happened to you or your school
Facts/Statistics	to back up your points
A strong conclusion	to make the reader really consider your point

Encourage students to read out their letters (and ask the class to give their feedback).

However small, students can be advocates of change through creating a campaign to drive decision-makers to account and to raise awareness of their issue. This campaign could be supported by banners, posters, protest songs and school assemblies to build confidence, creativity and communication skills, whilst developing a sense of belonging and concern for others.

Example letter from an older person (annotated)

Dear young person

On my walks since lockdown, I've found myself spending a lot of time with geese.

Now, if you'd told me that when I was your age, I'd have run a mile... Literally! The geese I knew then were farm geese, just like the white geese in story books, and as soon as they saw me coming, they'd chase me down the road!

But in my London neighbourhood, different sorts of geese live by the rivers, canals and ponds. Canada geese are not to be messed with, mind you – when they have their young, the parents are fierce! But I managed to get just close enough to sketch the adorable little goslings pottering along.

There's a gaggle of them in a local pond and they all go and eat together, a procession of them, from the pond to the patch of grass where they feed, then one of them seems to decide it's time to go back and off they go again, in single file.

They're nosy too. One day, I had my sketchbook in a bag that made a rustling sound and in an instant, I had new feathered friends around my feet, clearly hoping for a snack.

We have Egyptian geese too in my neighbourhood. They have beautiful honey-coloured, dark green and black feathers and they're much gentler creatures. There has been a family of six by the river and I've watched them grow up through the Summer. One day, when the goslings were nearly full-grown, they wandered up to me and they were making little chirruping noises – tiny sounds from enormous great birds!

Another day, I saw the goslings by the water, edging closer, looking as though they were playing a game of 'dare' over who'd go in first...

And then there was the day when I spotted the Canada geese having a lunchtime nap – standing up, on one leg. That was impressive – if I tried that, I'd fall over!

So what have London's geese taught me? Well, they've reminded me that you should never lose your sense of wonder – even when you're old!

Best wishes,

Lydia



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- highlight the main features that stand out. What do you notice?
- choose the best moment and explain why
- describe the images that come to mind
- communicate what the writer has said: *she has taken walks and has spent time with the geese in London during the pandemic.*
- explain your interpretation of the letter: *remember to notice the little things and never lose your sense of wonder*
- share one thing you will always remember about the letter

Example letter from an older person (without annotation)

Dear young person

On my walks since lockdown, I've found myself spending a lot of time with geese.

Now, if you'd told me that when I was your age, I'd have run a mile... Literally! The geese I knew then were farm geese, just like the white geese in story books, and as soon as they saw me coming, they'd chase me down the road!

But in my London neighbourhood, different sorts of geese live by the rivers, canals and ponds. Canada geese are not to be messed with, mind you – when they have their young, the parents are fierce! But I managed to get just close enough to sketch the adorable little goslings pottering along.

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