

Citizen Science

Promoting Civic Action- Writing a Letter to a Legislator

TERM 2013

LOCATION G+L+S

PROGRAM VideoGames and Learning

Overview of Lesson Based at Lake Mendota in Madison, WI, the player's goal of Citizen Science is to restore the lake. By focusing on the ecological needs of Lake Mendota as well as the surrounding community, the game is able to bring together real-world issues and scientific practices within a localized context. This lesson is designed to promote civic action among students as they compose a written letter to a member of legislature arguing for the conservation/restoration of a local lake.

Materials Needed lined paper or letterhead
pencils/pens
business letter envelopes
stamps
computers (optional)

Content of Lesson As a class, decide which state representative or government agency to direct the letters to. Explain to students that when writing written correspondences, whether via letter mail or email, there are informal and formal formats. For instance, when writing a letter to a friend it may look much different than when writing a letter to a teacher. When addressing the government, we obviously want to be taken seriously, and therefore want the latter.

The goal of the lesson is for students to create a concise and effective argument regarding one conservation or restoration issue of a local lake, as well as empower them to enact change in their community. While letter format and grammar are also important, we don't want to defer from the overarching goal. In this case, and especially for the primary grades, a structured framework for them to fill in may be helpful.

Addressing:

United States Senators	For Members of the U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable (full name) Washington, DC 20510	The Honorable (full name) U.S. House of Representatives Washington, DC 20515
Dear Senator (last name)	Dear Representative (last name)

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Introduction:

I am a fourth grade student from _____ Elementary School. . .

On behalf of the members of Mr./Ms. _____'s class. . .
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Opening:

Explain to students that we want the letters to be concise and to the point. For this reason, they should not be longer than one page. Students should follow the introduction with a statement of their concern. Some examples from Citizen Science may be, "We urge your support for _____", or "Please address _____".

The reduction of or removal of invasive species. . .
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The clean up of the beach. . .

Plant rain gardens to help collect run-off. . .

Stricter controls of phosphate usage and removal of at local farms. . .

The health of the lake. . .

Evidence and Support:

After the opening statement, students should follow up with an explanation of why they support or oppose the issue. The arguments should be well thought out and concise. It will be helpful to include the words, "Although", "Despite", and "Because". Have them reference the arguments they constructed during game play. If possible, make the letter even more personal by including a local anecdote or reason why the issue directly impacts the student.

Follow-Up:

Include specific contact information so that you may receive a follow up such as teacher email address or the post address of the school.

It is important that the students understand they may not receive a response, or that it may take a long time. A discussion for why this is would be beneficial, and students could brainstorm additional routes for action.

For more information on addressing state legislation, visit the National Education Association's Website at <http://www.nea.org/home/19657.htm>

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Learning Objectives Students will be able to participate in effective arguments utilizing evidence to support points, in an effort to enact change or raise awareness on a topic regarding lake ecology.

Students will be able to use keywords such as “because” and “although” in arguments, which can help build a case in convincing another person of something.

Students will be able to voice their opinion to local and state government.

Educational Standards

(MS-LS-IDE.e.) Use evidence to construct arguments for how biodiversity can influence humans’ resources as well as ecosystems services that humans rely on.

(MS-LS-MEOE.f) Use evidence to support arguments that changing any physical or biological component of an ecosystem may result in shifts in the populations of species in the ecosystem.

(3EIO.e) Use evidence to argue that some changes in an organism’s habitat can be beneficial or harmful to the organism.

(MS-ETS-ETSS.d) Construct arguments for and against the development of a new technology based on potential short and long term impacts (positive and negative) on the health of people, and the natural environment.

(MS-ETS-ED.f) Communicate information about a proposed solution to a problem, including relevant scientific principles, how the design was developed, how it meets the criteria and constraints of the problem, and how it reduces the potential for negative consequences for society and the natural environment.

(5ESI.g) Design and evaluate a process or product to minimize unwanted outcomes of human activities on Earth’s systems, while increasing

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benefits and meeting societal demands.

Common Core State Standards

(W.4.1) Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.