



Engaging Students in Contemporary Issues and Civic Action Through Art

Writing to Make a Difference

Appropriate Grade Levels: Grades 6 to 12

Appropriate Subject Areas: Language Arts; History/ Social Studies; Leadership

Main Objective:

Youth can participate in a legislative process by voicing their opinions through postcards written to their legislators.

Goals:

- To write a postcard that effectively and persuasively conveys their position on select and pending bills in the California State and U.S. federal legislatures that address the social issues raised by students
- To deepen critical thinking about the social issues students raise by sharing art projects with each other
- To explore how students can make a difference about their social issues
- To engage students about the assumptions they and adults make about youth agency

Relevant Standards:

Language Arts Standard 1.0 (5th Grade):

Students deliver focused, coherent presentations that convey ideas clearly and relate to the background and interests of the audience.

LAUSD Language Arts Standard 10 (9th and 10th Grade):

Students analyze and evaluate literature (art) and a variety of reading materials and information representing diverse cultural experiences.

Visual Arts Standard 4.1 (8th Grade):

Students define their own point of view and investigate how it affects their interpretation of art from cultures other than their own.

LAUSD History/ Social Studies Standard 9 (1st Grade):

Students analyze the major political, economic, and social developments that have shaped the history of the United States and the history of other contemporary countries in the world.

LAUSD History/ Social Studies Standard 11 (11th Grade):

Students analyze democratic principles and evaluate how those principles are evident in national and international issues and events.

English Language Development Standard (Intermediate Level):

Students actively participate in social conversations with peers and adults on familiar topics by asking and answering questions and soliciting information.

Materials/ Resources

- ❑ Postcards
- ❑ WTMD Bill Texts (for high school only)
- ❑ WTMD Bill Summaries
- ❑ WTMD Postcard-Writing Planning Tool
- ❑ WTMD Quick Facts and Resources

Introduction & Discussion

Outcomes: To build investment in the postcard-writing process; to challenge student assumptions about youth agency

1. Explore with students: Can youth make an impact on the legislative process? How many of you can vote in local, state or federal elections? What other ways are there to make an impact?
2. Share the following: Senator Barbara Boxer's office shared with us that they track the number of people who have written into her office about different issues and they see them as a proportion of the to the number of people the senator represents. In other words, every postcard they receive represents a much larger number of people in her district who did not write to her, but who hold similar views. How many people do you think one postcard represents to Senator Barbara Boxer? ... 300!... Every postcard represents 300 people who did not write, and did weigh in on issues.

In that way, each time you write to your legislators, they read your letter and assume that there are 299 other people who feel the same way you do. And for every other student you recruit to write, that's another 300 people they assume feel the same way. It's a powerful way to be heard by your legislators.

Legislative Text Analysis

Outcome: To understand the different points of view surrounding a social issue

Materials: "Writing to Make a Difference" Bill Summaries

Directions:

1. Hand out the actual bill texts and the bill summaries.
2. Students will take this time to work collaboratively in "expert groups" to figure out the point of the bills. This means that the entire class is dependent on each group getting an interpretation of the bill that makes sense to everyone else.
3. Focusing on the bill summaries, tell students they have 8 minutes to figure out the following:
 - What issue is this bill trying to address?
 - Bills are about changing something in society. What does this bill change?
 - What is 1 argument someone could give if they were in support of the bill?
 - What is 1 argument someone could give if they were opposed to this bill?

Make sure to have each group choose one person to write down their responses to report out to rest of the class.

4. Have each group present their bill, and their answers to these questions to the whole class. After each presentation, the class should have a brief opportunity for questions and answers and for discussion.

Writing the Postcard

Outcome: To create an effective and persuasive message about a social issue that can be received by a specific, professional audience

Materials: Postcards; Postcard-Writing Planning Tool; WTMD Quick Facts and Resources

Directions:

1. Pass out the Postcard-Writing Worksheet and postcards to students.
2. Ask students to choose the one bill that most interests them, about which they will write a postcard to their legislators. Reiterate to students that they do not have to choose the one that was given to their group.
3. Students will walk themselves through the postcard-writing process using their planning tools. They will focus on incorporating the following points into their postcard:
 - Which bill did you choose? Why did you choose that particular bill?
 - What is your opinion about this bill? Are you for or against it?
 - How would you respond to someone who took a position that was opposed to yours?
 - What facts and/ or experiences could you offer in support of your argument?
 - What recommendations would you make to the legislator as to how s/he can address your issue more effectively?
4. Make sure students have time to write a draft on the planning tool, and teacher has an opportunity to review these and provide feedback, before students transfer their message to their actual postcards. Remind students to write their names, schools, and grade levels, so that legislators can respond to their postcards.