

# Write to a Famous American

## Overview:

Students practice the writing process by writing a letter to a famous American while learning information that relates to that American.

## Procedure:

Students choose a famous American that connects to what they have been learning in History lessons. Students write a letter to that American, describing their feelings or thoughts of specific events, circumstances, and/or contributions related to that American. The letter should also include a date, greeting, and signature.

## ASOLs Covered in this Activity:

**5E-WP3c:** The student will select an event or personal experience and write one thing about it.

**Extension Idea:** Ask students to share a personal experience with the famous American to whom they are writing. Encourage the students to write about something that may connect or be related to themselves and their famous American. For example, if a student is writing to George Washington they could discuss the revolutionary war and then share that their father fought in a war. (This may be a great way to carry over the reading comprehension strategy of “Making Connections” into writing).

**5E-WP4b:** The student will use spelling rules when writing by capitalizing the first letter of familiar names.

**Extension Idea:** Writing a letter is a great opportunity for students to practice capitalizing the first letter of familiar names. Give students a sample letter and ask them to identify names within the letter that begin with a capital letter. Give students word cards that include names that should be capitalized and words or names that should not be capitalized and ask them to sort them. Remind students as they write their letters to their famous American to capitalize their American’s name throughout the letter.

**8E--WE1a:** The student will use standard rules when writing by using question marks at the end of written questions.

**Extension Idea:** Ask students to ask at least one question in their letter to a famous American.

**8E--WP4d:** The student will use information from literary or informational text to support writing by using specific claims in a text.

**Extension Idea:** Allow students to read and/or review informational texts that include specific information about their famous American. Ask the student to include information from their readings in their letter.

**HSE--WP1b:** The student will write to convey ideas and information using clear organization and including facts, details, and other information as well as graphics & multimedia as needed.

**Extension Idea:** Ask students to organize their letter in a specific format. Ask them to first introduce themselves, then describe a historical event about their famous American that they found interesting including specific facts and details related to that event, and to then include how those events made them feel or what the famous American and his/her accomplishments means to them.

**HSE--WP1c:** The student will write about an event or personal experience by introducing the event or experience, at least one character, and describing multiple events in sequence.

**Extension Idea:** Ask students to include the discussion of events that is pertinent to the famous American (the character) within their letter and to discuss what they think about those events. Ask the students to sequence multiple events within the letter. For example, a student may write a letter to George Washington and may include what he/she thought of the Revolutionary War including the reasons America won the war (HS-H21d)

**Extension Idea:** Encourage students to write a letter to a famous American, detailing something that they have in common. For example, a student may write a letter to Benjamin Franklin explaining a personal invention or a letter to Jackie Robinson describing a time that they were the “first” to do something.

**HSE--WP2c:** The student will write and revise work so that it communicates clearly to the intended audience.

**Extension Idea:** After writing their letter, students will be asked to select a fact or current event that they think their famous American would find interesting and revise their writing to include that information. Encourage students to inform their famous American (audience) of information that relates to something that is already written in the letter. For example, if the student writes to George Washington about the Revolutionary War with Great Britain, they might include that Great Britain is now one of our allies or that now instead of travelling on foot during war, Washington could travel by car or even airplane.

**HSE--WE1a:** The student will use standard English rules by using correct punctuation when writing.

**Extension Idea:** Use the opportunity of letter writing to teach proper use of periods, commas, exclamation marks, and question marks.

**Materials Needed:**

- writing utensils or alternative pencils
- famous American picture choices
- background information on famous Americans
- paper for letters

**Instructional Setting:**

Classroom

**Community Connections and/or Peer Interaction:**

Consider allowing students to read and share their letters with younger students from a different class. This could be an opportunity for the students to teach new information to younger students.

The students could also read their letter to their own classmates without revealing who the letter is written to and then ask the class to guess the famous American.

**Functional Activity/Routine:**

Allow students time to practice letter writing skills. Allow them to write “Thank You” letters when necessary, write letters to friends, or write letters to parents about how their day was.

**Strategies to Collect Evidence:**

Include the student's writing sample, along with a detailed anecdotal record that includes the prompt given. If your student is a scribbler or in one of the other early stages of developmental writing, be sure to include an interpretation of the writing in your anecdotal record. *Helpful hint: Use this letter as a way to test on history ASOL's and use for history evidence.*

**Specific Options for Differentiating this Activity:**

- Allow students to use their preferred "pencil" to complete this activity. This may include a writing utensil, keyboard, alternative pencil, or dictating to a scribe.
- A student in any of the developmental stages of writing can complete this activity.
  - \*If your student is a scribbler, be sure to reinforce his/her product as authentic writing, and if necessary, help assign meaning.
- Give students picture cue choices for greetings and salutations.
- Give students sentence choices for their letters and allow them to choose sentences and the order in which they appear.
- Give students sentences that relate to their famous American and sentences that do not and ask them to identify the correct sentences for their letter.
- Give sentence frames and ask students to fill in the blanks. Allow them to either write in their answers or glue in premade choices.
- Give prewritten letters and allow a student to choose the letter they would like to sign. Allow the student to practice signing, writing, and/or spelling his/her name at the end of the letter.

*\*Some of the above suggestions may not meet the requirements of certain standards. For students who are working at early stages of writing, these ideas may be great for teaching the pre--requisite skills needed to learn the standards.*