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Write a Letter, Make a Difference

By Leslie Laskin-Reese

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by: **Leslie Laskin-Reese**

Today I took the dog for a walk and realized that there is a letter that I must write. Near our house, we walk up a once paved road that is now mostly rock and mud. It runs behind several houses then up a hill and ends at some very high priced home sites that are, as yet, unbuilt. In the winter this is a beautiful trail lined with small waterfalls and lush green trees, in summer it is a trail overrun by wildflowers that the neighborhood children enjoy picking. This trail, used regularly by its neighbors, is in danger of disappearing. The developer of the homesites is petitioning the city to repave the trail and make it once again an automobile thoroughfare. This trail is a vital part of our neighborhood, and losing it to another street (that would benefit only the future homeowners of 5 homesites) would distress those who use it regularly to walk the dog, teach their children about nature, or to escape the concrete jungle for a moment of peace.

Choose Your Topic

But, of course, the city planners won't know this unless we tell them. That is what a letter writing campaign is about....telling the people in charge what is important to us. And it is up to each of us to determine what is important, and then appropriately express that opinion. Leaders of government as well as corporate leaders value our opinions, because it is our opinions that keep them in power. Their power to do right (or not) is given to them by us! So, use your power to help create the world in which you want to live. And don't limit yourself to local issues. There are global organizations that conduct letter writing campaigns to create change socially, politically, environmentally and economically around the world. These organizations need us to speak up.

Verify the facts

Before you begin your letter, do your homework. Who is in charge? Get the correct name and title. Find out what has been done to date regarding this issue. Do an internet search on the topic, visit the library and use the very underused and extremely knowledgeable reference librarian, call the local

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governing body to determine the status of the issue. If you are writing as part of a globally organized letter writing campaign, the organization conducting the campaign will provide thorough background information for your use. Read this information. It is vital that you are knowledgeable on your topic if you want your letter to be read and taken seriously.

Write an Effective Letter

A letter to any corporate or political official must be professional, concise, and personal. Your goal is to get your letter read, and that will not happen if you don't maintain these standards. When you are ready to begin your letter, get out a nice white piece of paper and type your letter. Begin with the correct name, address and title of the official as well as the date. Be sure to include your return address on the letter (not just on the envelope) so that you can request and receive a response. Now organize your thoughts (on a separate piece of paper) and begin writing. Keep the following in mind: Your letter should be short while covering all necessary information. Be polite and constructive, never

inflammatory or accusatory. Presume that the person to whom you are writing is reasonable and treat him or her with due respect. Be certain of your facts. One incorrect or insufficiently researched fact will render your entire letter useless. Communicate your understanding of the context of the overall situation as well as the specific issue at hand. Be specific about the action you are looking for, don't speak about vague or theoretical ideals. Personalize your letter with information about why this issue is important to you, and how it affects you. If the organization or person to whom you are writing has taken positive steps on this issue, compliment their action. Finally, respectfully request a response to your letter and sign your letter by hand.

If you follow these steps, you can create a dialog between yourself and the official in charge. Become a respected member of this official's community whose opinion is welcome and desired, and you have made a difference.

Follow Up

If appropriate, send a copy of your letter to the local newspaper. Generating more interest in the issue creates better opportunity to create the desired action. Then, keep track of the result of your action. If you receive a response, acknowledge the response and thank the official for his or her consideration. If the action you requested is carried out, send a thank you letter expressing your appreciation. If you hear nothing and the issue seems to be unresolved, send another letter. We have a voice, but it is only heard if we speak!

Leslie Laskin–Reese is a writer and the founder of Letters and Paper (

),
a website dedicated to preserving the fine art of letter writing.

Awesome Alliteration

By Dorie Thurston

Awesome Alliteration by Dorie Thurston

This lesson teaches the student how to write with alliteration, which means that the same letter sound is repeated at the beginning of two or more words in a sentence. The lesson also reviews adding adjectives and adverbs for a more descriptive sentence.

First, the teacher reads the book, Thank You for the Thistle, or any other book that is alliterated. Ask the class if they heard anything special about the style of writing of the story that you have just read. Explain that this is called alliteration, and authors use this method of writing to get the readers attention. Tell the class that they will now write a sentence in the same manner as a group. Put the word "cat" on the board and ask students to think of an adjective or descriptive word that tells us what kind of cat it is. The adjective has to start with the "k" sound. It can begin with a "c" or a "k." (Crazy, cool, calico, cute) Then ask them to think of a verb or action word that begins with the "k" sound. What does the cat do? (Caught, climbed, crawled) Now how did the cat do it? Think of an adverb that begins with the letter sound "k." (Carefully, carelessly, cautiously) Where did he do it or what did he catch? Continue until a nice sentence is written on the board. Pick another subject, such as "dog," and write another sentence together. Then have them write sentences on their own and share them with the class. Make sure that you explain that certain letter combinations do not make the same sound such as the "ch" sound instead of "k" sound or the "th" sound instead of the "t" sound. When children are comfortable with alliterating, tell them that they are going to write an alphabet book for the kindergarteners. Give each student a letter of the alphabet and tell them to pick an animal that begins with that letter. They will then write an alliterated sentence using that letter and draw a picture to illustrate their sentence. Each student can then read their sentence to the kindergarteners in alphabetical order like an alphabet book.

Thank You for the Thistle by Dorie Thurston can be found at <http://www.doriebooks.com>

Graduated from University of Richmond with a Bachelor of Arts degree and received Intermediate Honors in Sophomore year. Wrote a children's book which is highly recommended for elementary school teachers.

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