**Subject area/course**: History/Social Studies; U.S. Government

**Grade level/band**: 12

**Task source**: Summit Public Schools

**Letter to an Elected Official**

**TEACHER'S GUIDE**

1. **Task overview**:

In this task, students will select and conduct research on an elected official who represents them at the federal level – a member of the House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate. Students will then choose a relevant issue or a current piece of legislation and convey their viewpoints through a thoughtfully written letter to inform their legislator what they can do to best address the chosen issue. The letter should take the form of a brief, well-reasoned argument in support of a proposal, policy, or legislative action the student would like the elected official to support.

1. **Aligned standards:**
2. **Primary Common Core State Standards**

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/1/) Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/2/) Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/WHST/11-12/4/) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.5](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/WHST/11-12/5/) Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.9](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/WHST/11-12/9/) Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.10](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/11-12/10/) By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

1. **Critical abilities**

Research: Conduct sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem, narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate, and demonstrate understanding of the subject under investigation. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, use advanced searches effectively, and assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the specific task, purpose, and audience.

Analysis of Information: Integrate and synthesize multiple sources of information (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to address a question, make informed decisions, understand a process, phenomenon, or concept, and solve problems while evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

Communication in Many Forms: Use oral and written communication skills to learn, evaluate, and express ideas for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, and rewriting while considering the audience.

Interpersonal Interaction and Collaboration: Develop a range of interpersonal skills, including the ability to work with others, to participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations.

1. **Time/schedule requirements:**

This task will take approximately six class periods to complete.

1. **Materials/resources:**

Students will need access to the Internet to complete this task, and the following documents:

* Item A. Research Guide
* Item B. Sample Letter 1
* Item C. Sample Letter 2
* Item D. Resource Letter Formatting
* Item E. Peer Review Form
1. **Prior knowledge:**

Students should

* Have some knowledge of how both houses of Congress are organized, how legislators are chosen, and why they might be responsive to communications from their constituents.
* Have some experience using evidence from other sources to support claims and support written arguments.
* Have some familiarity with using the Internet to search for documents to use in a research project.
1. **Connection to curriculum:**

This task connects to the study of the federal government, the legislative branch in particular, and the role of citizens as active participants in a representative democracy.

1. **Teacher instructions:**

DAY 1

Introduce the topic by discussing the role of Congress and efforts citizens often make to communicate directly with elected officials about important issues and bills they may be considering. Explain the task. Pass out the Research Guide (Item A) and tell students they will be using Step 1 to take notes on the elected official they choose and Step 2 to take notes on the issue they will focus on in their letter to that official. Give students time to use the Internet to identify and learn more about the elected official they will write to.

DAY 2

Tell students to use this time to research an issue and complete both parts of the Research Guide, either in class or as homework. Explain that they will use the notes they take in the Research Guide to help them write their letter to their elected official.

DAY 3

Hand out and discuss the rubric. Give students Sample Letter 1 and Sample Letter 2 (Items B and C). Ask them to read both letters and then write answers to the questions attached to one of these letters. Point out that these questions are based on the categories in the rubric. By assessing the sample letters with this rubric, students will be able to see how their own letter to an elected official will be assessed.

DAY 4

Discuss Sample Letter 1 and Sample Letter 2 and ask students to share some of their answers to the questions attached to each letter. Have students begin work on their own letters to an elected official. Ask each student to complete a rough draft of the letter as homework.

DAY 5

Divide students into groups, three students to a group. Each student will read the rough draft letters of the other two students in the group. Give each student a Peer Review form (Item E) and have them answer the first two questions on the form. Then each student will complete the Peer Review forms of the other two students in the group. If time remains, have students discuss the feedback on their Peer Review forms within their small groups. They will then use these forms to help them revise their rough drafts.

DAY 6

Students complete and hand in the final draft of their letter to an elected official.

1. **Student support:**

None listed.

1. **Extensions or variations:**

None listed.

1. **Scoring:**

Student work can be scored using the Letter to an Elected Official Rubric.