

Title of the Lesson: You've Got Mail!

Grade Level: 2nd Grade (adaptable for 1st-5th)

Length of Lesson: 1-2 weeks; approximately 45 min. per day (15 - 20 minute mini-lesson; 25 - 30 minutes for students to write and conference with adults and peers)

Overview of the Lesson: Students will write letters to friends and family persuading them to read a book or check out a character and publish and share their letters using www.lettrs.com.

Essential Learning Outcomes Questions:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to...

- * I can form an opinion about a character or text.
- * I can go back to the text and find evidence to support my opinion in the words and pictures.
- * I can write about my opinion and support it with evidence.
- * I can write a letter with a greeting, body, and closing.
- * I can share my writing with other writers for feedback and new ideas.
- * I can listen to my friend's writing and give him feedback.
- * I can revise my writing with my own new ideas or with ideas from other writers.
- * I can edit my writing for capital letters and punctuation.
- * I can use a computer to publish my writing and share it with others.
- * I can use a rubric to reflect on my writing and make it better.

NC Common Core Standards Being Addressed:

English Language Arts Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.1 Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., *because, and, also*) to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.6 With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

Computer Technology Skills Standards:

Objective 2.05 Recognize, discuss, and use word processing as a tool to enter/edit, print, and save assignments. Strand - Keyboard Utilization/Word Processing/Desk Top Publishing

Objective 2.07 Identify and use correct finger placement for home row keys. Strand - Keyboard Utilization/Word Processing/Desk Top Publishing

Materials Needed: Familiar texts with favorite characters (ideas include *Mercy Watson, Henry & Mudge, Clementine*, and the *Elephant & Piggie* series); chart paper; index cards or sticky notes for each student; drafting paper for each student; pens for peer editing; computers or iPads with internet access; a lettrs.com account.

How the Lesson Will Flow:

Prior to starting this unit in Writers' Workshop, ask your students to bring copies of their favorite books to school from home or to select some from the classroom or school library. You may want to ask them several days before launching the unit to give them time to reflect and collect their books. Also gather some of your favorite children's books that you have read together as a class to use as anchor texts. To prepare for the technology portion of the unit, create an account on www.lettrs.com. Please note that you can get an account for free. If your students have their own school e-mail addresses, you may want to create individual accounts for them, but it is possible to manage their letters within one shared account.

DAY 1 When you begin the unit have your students take out their beloved books and talk about why you love the books you selected. Provide opportunities for your students to share with partners and with the whole group about why they love the books they selected. Questions to ask to guide conversation include:

- Why did you like this character/book?
- Would you want to be friends with this character? Why?
- How did you feel when you were reading the book?
- How did you feel when the book was over?

Set the purpose for the unit by telling them that they are going to be writing letters to friends and family members about their favorite characters or books. Brainstorm previous experiences your students have had with letter writing both at school and outside of school.

Remind them that writers are also readers and that writers often have opinions about books that they want to share with other writers and that they can do this by writing letters. If your students are unfamiliar with the word "opinion," explain that it is a judgment or decision a person makes about a topic.

Share an example of one of your favorite books or characters and state your opinion about it. You may want to model revisiting a few pages and using the text and pictures to help you generate your opinions. Ideas include:

- I think Piggie is a kind friend to Gerald in the *Elephant and Piggie* series. See how she put on so many crazy costumes to cheer him up in *My Friend is Sad?*
- Clementine is one of my favorite book characters because she is hilarious! She always calls her brother vegetable names like “Celery” or “Turnip.” And when he said he wanted to go for a walk, she put him in a *wok* and spun him around!
- I love Mercy Watson, but I believe she is very spoiled. Mrs. Watson is always making her hot buttered toast. The Watsons treat Mercy like she is their child!

Have your students look at the books they selected and think of opinions they have about the books and characters. Give them a chance to share with partners and/or the whole group.

Ask them to go back to their seats and choose one of their books/characters to write about. Provide them with index cards or sticky notes to write down their opinions. Then have them re-examine the text and pictures for reasons that support their opinions. Ask them to jot these reasons down on their index cards or sticky notes. At the end of writers’ workshop, give them a chance to share their ideas and evidence with a partner.

Prior to day 2 start draft a letter on chart paper about one of your favorite books or characters in which you state your opinion and provide evidence from the text.

DAY 2 Remind your students that writers are also readers and that they can write about the books they enjoy. Review your opinion for the anchor text you shared on Day 1 and revisit the text and pictures to share your reasons for forming that opinion. Introduce the letter you wrote on chart paper to the class about your favorite book/character. After reading your letter to the class, ask the students to identify where you stated your opinion. Then have them locate evidence you used from the text and pictures.

If your students are familiar with the parts of a letter, review the greeting, body, and closing on your model. If this is your first classroom experience with letter writing, label the parts of the letter on your example letter and explain the conventions of letter writing (the date, salutation, commas, spacing, indentions, closing, signature, etc.)

Ask your students to take out the book they selected yesterday and their notes about their opinion. Tell them to use the ideas they generated yesterday to start a letter to a friend or family member in which they:

- * share their opinion,
- * provide evidence from the text to support their opinion,
- * and provide evidence from the pictures to support it.

Circulate and offer support where needed. Select a few students to share what they have written thus far and note how they used details from the text and illustrations to support their opinions. Give students time to share with their writing partners at the end of the workshop.

Continuing with drafting, editing, revising, and publishing

Your subsequent mini-lessons will depend on needs you see in your students' writing as you circulate and conference with them. You will want to highlight things different students are doing well in their work and give them opportunities to talk about their writing with peers. You will also want to model how to improve your writing using your own letter draft. Some potential mini-lessons to anticipate include:

- * Structure mini-lessons on supporting your opinion with details from the text and/or the illustrations.
- * Using transition words like *also*, *another*, *because*, and *for example* to strengthen your writing. (and possibly revising your writing to remove overused transition words like “and”)
- * Effective beginnings that introduce your opinion and make your reader want to keep reading
- * Effective endings that remind your reader of your opinion
- * Using a rubric to reflect on your writing and improve it
- * Editing your writing for capital letters and/or punctuation
- * How to buddy edit for spelling, capitalization, and/or punctuation
- * How to use quotation marks to include things a character says
- * Re-reading your work to make sure it makes sense
- * How to have a conversation with a buddy about your writing
- * Possible questions to ask your partner:
 - Can you explain why you said the character was _____?
 - Can you show me in the text a time when the character was _____?
 - Can you show me a picture that shows the character being _____?
 - I didn't understand what you wrote here. Can you explain it to me?

The amount of time you spend drafting, editing, and revising will also vary since it will depend on the length of your writing block and the needs of your students. As students begin to finalize their drafts, you will want to reserve the computer lab or laptop cart if they are available at your school. If you have a computer or several computers in your classroom, you will want to plan a schedule so all of your students can have time to publish their letters.

If you have a projector, it would be useful to introduce lettrs.com to the whole class during your mini-lesson time. If you do not have a

projector, you may want to show small groups of students on your computer.

Model how you go to the website. You may want to create a generic username and password for your students to use in order to login. Show them how to login with the e-mail address and password using the link on the upper right hand corner of the page. Once you login, you will click on the “Write a letter” link in the top center of the page. A screen that looks like a sheet of paper will appear with the date and the words “Start writing!” If your students would like to personalize their letters, they can change the stationary by clicking on the different themes located above the letter.

Depending on your students’ prior knowledge, you may also want to use this time to review keyboarding skills such as how to place your fingers on the home row keys, how to use the “Enter/Return” key to go to a new line of text, how to use the space bar, and/or how to use the “Shift” key to capitalize.

If your writing block ends before your students finish typing, they can save their work by clicking the “Finish Later” icon to the left of their letter. When they login the next time, they can retrieve their letter by moving the mouse over their name in the upper right hand corner of the homepage and selecting “Drafts” from the drop down menu that appears. It is possible to have more than one letter in your “Drafts” folder at a time, so if you are using a generic login for all of your students, they will not have a problem saving their draft. To open his/her letter, your student will locate a thumbnail of the letter in the “Drafts” folder and click on it. A preview of the letter will appear. To the right of the preview, your student can click on “Edit” to continue working on his/her letter.

When a student is ready to publish the letter, (s)he can click on the “Choose Delivery” envelope icon to the right of the letterhead. A screen will appear with three delivery options: physical delivery, digital

delivery, or open letter. I recommend the digital delivery option because the physical delivery requires payment for postage and the open letter could be seen by anyone on the lettrs.com site. To e-mail the letter, click the “Continue” button under the “Digital Delivery” section. A page will appear asking for you to enter in the recipient’s e-mail address. You will either need to type the e-mail address of your student’s friend or family member or you can have your student e-mail the letter to you. Once you enter the e-mail, click deliver and your student’s letter will be sent!

If you would like to see the letter after it has been sent, you can click on your username and select “Desk Drawer” from the drop down menu that appears. Small thumbnails of all sent letters will appear. To open one, click on the thumbnail. If you would like to print your student’s letter, you can select the “Print” option, which appears to the right of your student’s letter. Please note that only the text will appear when you print, and not the stationary. You may want to prepare your students for this fact, so they will not be disappointed.

Assessment:

Rubric (modified from Lucy Calkins’s Opinion Writing Checklist)

This rubric can be used throughout the unit for students to reflect on and strengthen their own writing. Teachers can also use it at the end of the unit to evaluate their students’ final pieces.

Opinion Writing Checklist

	Not Yet	Starting To	Yes!
Structure			
I wrote my opinion and gave reasons for it.			
I wrote a beginning that gave my opinion and made my reader want to keep reading.			
I used words such as <i>also</i> , <i>another</i> , <i>because</i> , and <i>for example</i> to connect my reasons.			
I reminded readers of my opinion in my ending.			
Elaboration			
I wrote at least two reasons.			
I wrote at least a few sentences to support each reason.			
I used evidence from the text and/or pictures to support my reasons.			
I chose words that would make my reader agree with my opinion.			
I talked with other writers about my writing and added more to my writing.			

Mechanics			
I used words I already know to help me spell other words.			
I spelled word wall words correctly.			
I used my writing buddy to help me spell words.			
I can read my writing and my writing buddy can read most or all of it.			
I used capital letters for names and at the beginning of the sentence.			
I used punctuation at the end of every sentence.			
I used quotation marks to show what people said.			
Technology			
I logged into my computer.			
I found "Safari" to go on the Internet.			
I used what I know about the home row keys to help me publish my writing.			
I used the "shift" key when I needed a capital letter.			
I saved my work.			

Sources for the Lesson: The idea for writing persuasive letters about books and characters comes from Lucy Calkins's 2nd Grade Common Core *Writing About Reading* Opinion Unit, particularly Bend 1, Sessions 1 - 4. I adapted this unit to integrate technology.