



WALTER & LEONORE ANNENBERG
PRESIDENTIAL LEARNING CENTER



Letters to the President

A Lesson for Elementary Students

Developed by
The Walter and Leonore Annenberg Presidential Learning Center
Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation
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Lesson Plan

In a 1988 radio address in which he discussed education, President Ronald Reagan said, “The education our children deserve is the kind no American should be deprived of, for it’s the basic instruction in what it means to be an American... Jefferson and the Founders believed a nation that governs itself, like ours, must rely upon an informed and engaged electorate.”

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn both to be informed and to be engaged as they learn about an issue that is important to them, and communicate their thoughts on the issue to the President of the United States.

Objectives

Students will be able to (SWBAT):

- Understand the process for sharing their concerns with the President.
- Advocate for an issue of their choosing via correspondence to the White House.
- Analyze primary source documents.
- Utilize research skills to develop ideas around an issue that is important to them.
- Students will submit their ideas to the POTUS using one or more means of communication.

Skills

1. Analytical skills
2. Research skills
3. Composition skills
4. Expository and Persuasive Writing
5. Digital Literacy (Optional)
6. Developing civic literacy and advocacy skills

Classroom Procedures

I. Essential Question(s): How can I communicate with the executive branch?

II. Agenda

- EQ: see above
- Hook: Response to Video “White House Letters to the President”
- Primary Source Exploration: Andy Smith Correspondence with President Reagan.
- Exit Slip

III. Hook (10—15 minutes)

- Go to the White House’s YouTube Channel and show the “White House Letters to the President” <http://youtu.be/eGoomM8QEGk>
- Background – The forty-fourth President Barack Obama was inaugurated in January 2009 with a vow to have a transparent White House. The Obama Administration has made efforts to stay up to date with the latest trends in technology and social media and the video above shows how communication from the people ultimately reaches the desk of the president.
- After watching the video, ask students to write for five minutes in response to the video. They can either write a free response or respond to “How do our concerns get shared with the President?” or “Why might people write to the President?” Then students should share their writing with a partner. After partner discussion, have a few students share out their responses.

IV. Primary Source Exploration (30-40 minutes)

- Explain that the President is a representative of the American people, but that in order for our opinions

and ideas to be heard by the President, we must communicate our thoughts and ideas using the proper channels. The president is not likely to hear our concerns if we complain to our friends, but if we have some ideas and share them directly with the president, our concerns are more likely to be heard. Also, remind students to be positive and have a solution oriented approach to writing the president. Complaining about a problem is not useful without a thoughtful solution.

For 4-5 Students

- Distribute copies of Andy Smith's Letter to President Reagan and his response.

For K-3 Students

- Choose and distribute a grade level appropriate letter from the resources included at the end of this lesson. There are a selection of letters from students ranging from Kindergarten to 3rd grade.
- Distribute Student Handout A (included). This is a document developed by the National Archives that will help students analyze the primary source letters used in this lesson. Guides students through the letter from the student and the response from President Reagan, then have them complete Student Handout A with the student letter.
- Now that students have seen a model letter to the president, have students decide on an issue they'd like to write about using Student Handout A1.
- Next, distribute Student Handouts B and C. Student Handout B is a graphic organizer designed to help students organize their thoughts for the correspondence. Student Handout C is an example that shows the format for the letter.
- Students should write a rough draft by hand regardless of the mode of contact they ultimately decide to use. Research shows that writing by hand stimulates the brain's creative powers in ways that aren't replicated when typing on a computer.
- Before having students write their own rough draft, model how you would write your letter to the president. Don't necessarily show them just the finished product, but narrate the decisions you make while writing to help them understand the habits of an effective writer. After students have completed a rough draft, have them work with a partner or small group to review the various parts of the letter.
- Distribute Student Handout D, which examines the many ways that students can share their message with the president. Read through as a class and ask students to decide which method of communication best fits with their message and their skills as a communicator.
- Have students visit <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact>
- Show students the various options for corresponding with the White House:
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Flickr
 - MySpace
 - YouTube
 - Vimeo
 - iTunes
 - LinkedIn

V. Exit Slip (5 minutes)

- Students can turn in their rough draft of their letter as an exit slip. A quick review will give you an idea of how well they understood the activity.

VI. Extension

- Have students think about other political and community figures to whom they might write a letter. For example, the principal, the mayor, or the governor. Have them write another copy of their letter to the appropriate local or state figure.
- Have students post their letters, videos, and photos to a class blog devoted to civic engagement. Share this blog with parents and local government.

EXAMINING A LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

Directions: Today you will read a letter written by a student like you to the President of the United States. As you read, answer the questions below to help you understand the different parts of the letter.

1) How was the letter written? _____

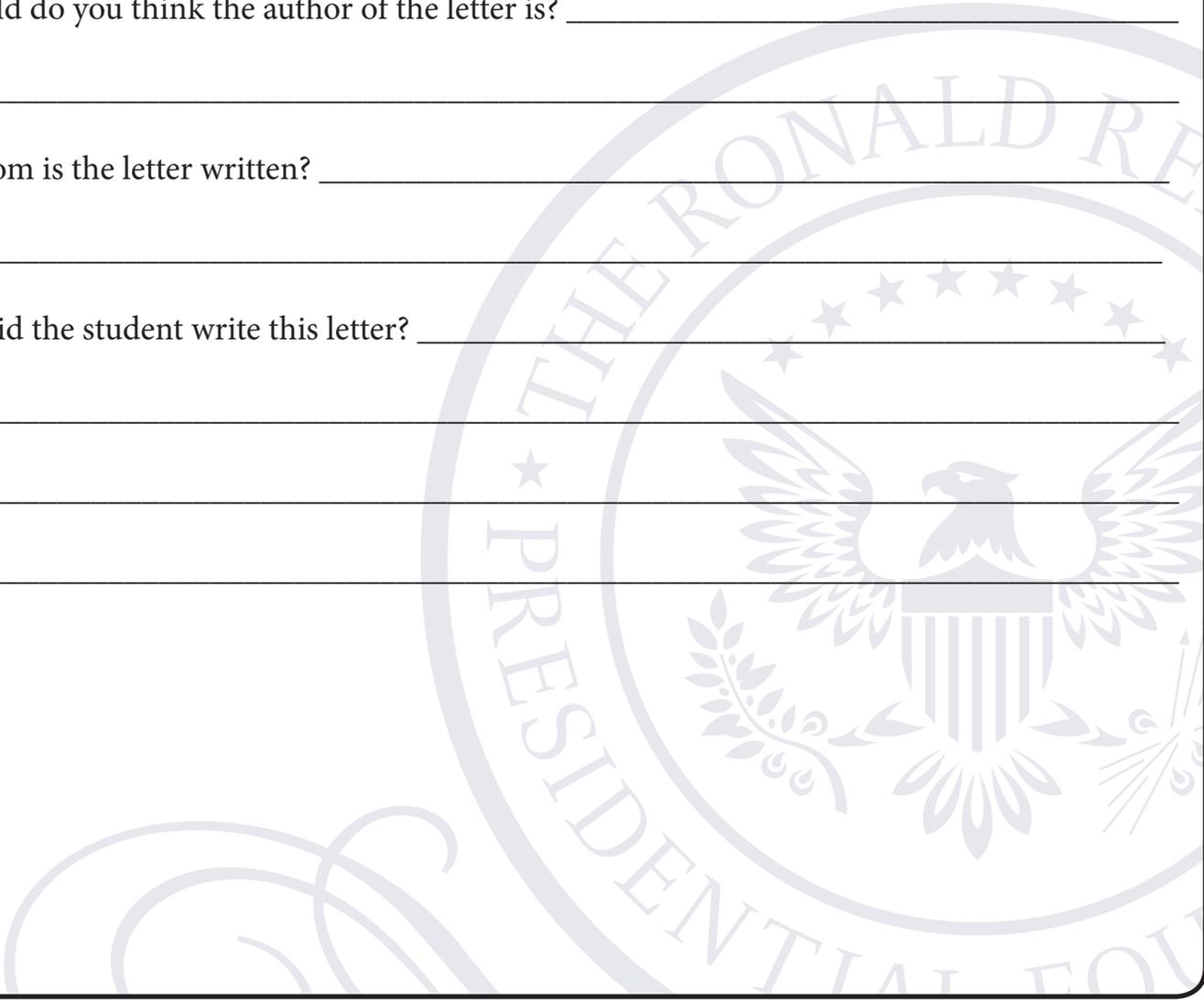
2) Write down the date of the letter: _____

3) Who wrote the letter? _____

4) How old do you think the author of the letter is? _____

5) To whom is the letter written? _____

6) Why did the student write this letter? _____



Directions: Choose a topic from the list below and use the following sheet to help you write your letter to the president.

Topics for Younger Students (K-2)

- 1) If I had one wish, it would be...
- 2) If I could change one thing about the world, it would be...
- 3) If I could do one thing to help others, I would...
- 4) If I were in charge of all the schools, I would make sure that all students learn about...
- 5) One problem I'd like to fix is... I would fix it by...
- 6) Choose your own topic.

Topics for Older Students

- 1) Economy: Suggestions for ways to create jobs.
- 2) Health Care: Suggestions for ways to ensure people get the health care they need.
- 3) Foreign Affairs: Suggestions for ways to solve disputes with other countries.
- 4) Civil Rights: Suggestions for ways to ensure that people of different ethnicities or different genders are treated fairly.
- 5) Energy: Suggestions for ways to provide cheaper energy for cars, homes, etc...
- 6) Seniors: Suggestions for ways to make sure the elderly are adequately cared for.
- 7) Censorship: Suggestions about what sorts of movies, books, or video games are appropriate for school age children.
- 8) Education: Suggestions about what sort of things students should learn about, how they are tested, and how much say they should have about the subjects they study in school.
- 9) Homeland Security: Suggestions about ways to make sure the U.S. is safe from threats.
- 10) Environment: Suggestions about ways to handle the interaction of man and the environment.
- 11) Other: Choose your own topic.

WRITING A LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

Directions: Did you know that anyone in our country can write a letter to the President of the United States? Use the sheet below to help you write a letter to the President.

Letter to the President

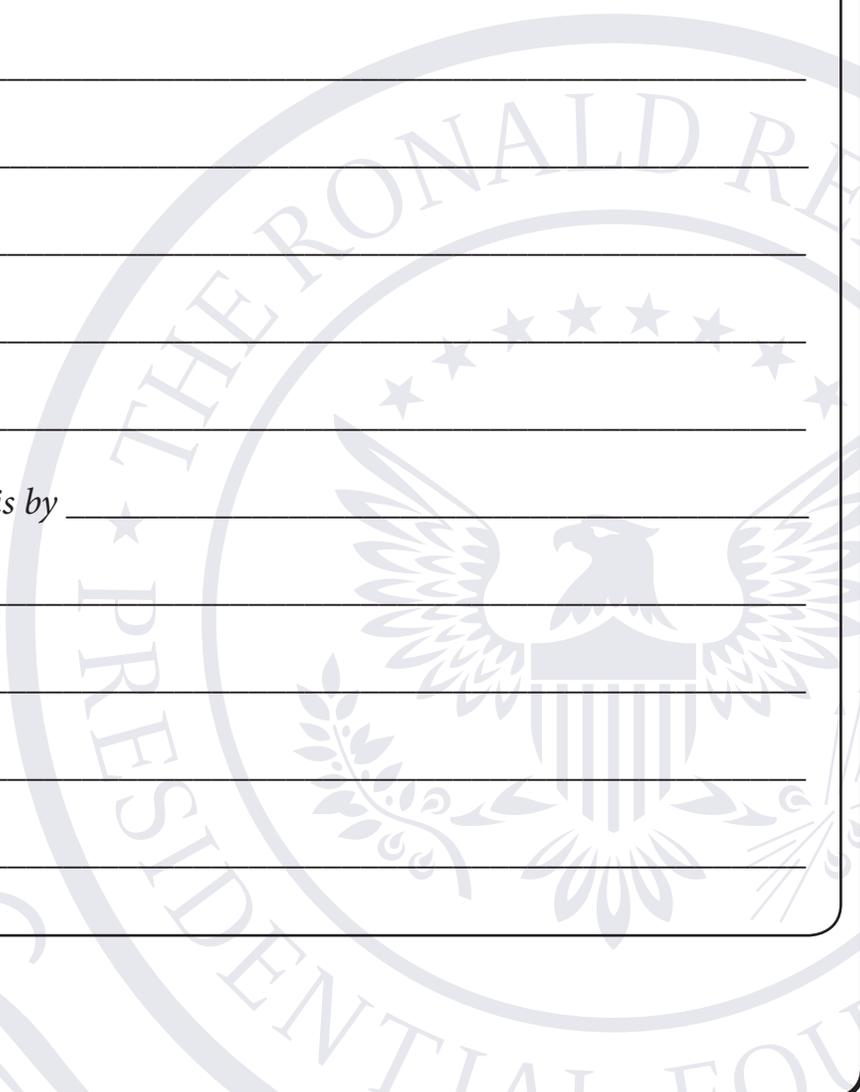
My name is _____

I am in _____ grade at (school) _____

I think the biggest problem in our _____ is _____

This is a problem because _____

I think the best way to fix this problem is by _____



FORMAT FOR LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

Student Handout

C



WALTER & LEONORE ANNENBERG
PRESIDENTIAL LEARNING CENTER
* * * *

1234 Civics Drive
Beverly Hills, CA 90210
July 4, 2011

Heading

Your address and the date you wrote the letter

President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Address

Name and address of person to whom you are writing

Dear Mr./Mrs. President:

Salutation

A formal greeting

In the introductory paragraph, you want to be sure to introduce yourself and explain the reason you are writing in the first place. Be sure to include your name, your grade, and your school when you introduce yourself. You might also want to include an interesting fact or two that relates to your letter. For example, if you a part of student government, or if you are involved with a service organization, you can include that information here. When you introduce your reason for writing, you should state your reason as clearly and simply as you can. There will be plenty of room to explain yourself in the next paragraph.

In this paragraph you will provide more information about your issue. You should try to give at least two specific reasons that explain why this issue is a concern to you. You should talk about how this issue affects you or those around you. Use the most compelling examples to help convince your reader of the importance of this issue.

In your final paragraph, you should suggest a solution to your concern. Nothing positive comes from complaining about an issue without any ideas about ways to solve the problem. In this section of your letter, you will present an idea for how to address your concern. Be sure to think carefully about this, and to write about it as clearly as you can.

Body

The text of your letter

Sincerely,

Closing and Signature

Concerned Student

A polite final closing and your name

HOW DO I CONNECT WITH THE PRESIDENT?

Student Handout **D**

Directions: In the 21st Century, there are more ways than ever before to communicate with elected officials. The proliferation of the internet and social media means that you can share your ideas with the president through writing, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, just to name a few. In fact, if you visit the contact page on the White House website, there are more than 10 different ways to connect with the president. Visit <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact> and discuss with your teacher the best way for you to share your message to the president. Then check the appropriate box and read the reminders for your chosen method.

Method 1: *Writing*

Options

- 1) Letter
- 2) E-mail

This is for me. I'm going to write
the president:

If you are a strong writer, and can clearly convey your ideas using words, you should write to the president. Once you have written your letter, you can either put it in an envelope and mail it to the president. You can also use your computer to e-mail your letter to the president. If you choose to write, remember to:

- Proof read and revise your writing before sending.
- Make sure the quality of your writing and your thoughts are worthy of the president.

Method 2: **Video**

Options

- 1) YouTube
- 2) Vimeo

This is for me. I'm going to make a
video for the president:

If you are a strong speaker, have a flair for the dramatic, and have access to a video camera, you should create a video for the president. Once you have written a script, you can work with a team to film, edit, and add any titles or soundtrack you need to enhance your video. You can use your computer to upload your message to the president. If you choose to make a video, remember to:

- Carefully edit your video to ensure it is of the best possible quality.
- Practice what you will say and the way you will say it before turning on the camera.

Method 3: **Other**

Options

- 1) Facebook or MySpace
- 2) Twitter
- 3) Flickr or other photo sharing site

This is for me. I'm going to send my
message to the president through
Facebook, Twitter, or Flickr:

If you enjoy sharing images, ideas, and links through sites like Facebook, Twitter, or Flickr, you should consider using social media to share your message with the president. Depending on your chosen medium, you can comment, send a brief message, or share a photo related to your issue. If you choose social media, remember:

- Whenever you post something online, anyone in the world can see it. Be sure it accurately represents both you and your ideas in a positive way.



WALTER & LEONORE ANNENBERG
PRESIDENTIAL LEARNING CENTER



Letters to the President

Letters for use in K-3 classrooms

Dear Mr. President,

If I had one wish
for children of the

world it would be

to have no wars.

Glen Hobart

Dear Mr. President,

If I had one wish
for children of the
world, it would be
to have food.

Dear Mr President

If I had one wish
for children of the
worlds it would be
to have a lot of love

Kenny

Dy

March 11, 1982

065877

4617

PR014-02

Red Jacket Elementary
School

Dear Girls and Boys:

X

Mrs. Dorothy Lux was kind enough to forward your messages to me. I was glad to learn about your one wish for the children of the world and I was very touched to read of your hopes and dreams. It would be wonderful if all wishes could come true right away.

What we do together will decide if our hopes become reality or simply fade. Like your parents, grandparents, and teachers, I am deeply concerned about the kind of world that we will leave for you and your children. We hope and pray you will always be able to grow, to dream, and to become all that you want to be.

Our wish is for a free world, a world where all human life is held sacred, where all people are treated with dignity and respect and are free to practice their religion, to choose their path in life and to live together in harmony.

Making this wish come true will not be easy. But each of you can do something to give it a chance. It will take a little work. The most important thing now is to study and learn why freedom means so much and, yes, why so many are afraid of it. Read what is happening in countries today where there is no freedom. Ask yourself some important questions:

Suppose you were not allowed to decide what kind of work you should do for the rest of your life? Suppose you never had the chance to vote, or to travel freely within or outside your country, or to voice your own opinions?

Pl: Mrs. Jan. Lux's children on their wishes for the world

What would it be like if children were taken away from their parents and raised by the State? If, in turn, when they grew up, they were not free to raise and enjoy their own children?

What happens when human life and private property are not respected? Why do we need laws to protect them? What do law enforcement officers do to help? Why should we treat them with respect? What might happen to our lives and homes without these laws?

What would it be like to have all of our churches closed, if people were not permitted to worship as they chose?

These may seem like very difficult questions, but for many children of your age around the world they are the most important ones. For many children the biggest wish might be to have the freedom we enjoy in America.

My real wish for you is that you not only will grow up in a free world, but that you will always be ready to keep that freedom and to help bring it to other children everywhere.

Our freedom is a very precious gift and it must be treasured, preserved, and cared for with all our hearts.

With my best wishes to you and to all at Red Jacket Elementary School,

Sincerely,

RONALD REAGAN

Pupils of the First Grade Class
c/o Mrs. Dorothy Lux
Red Jacket Elementary School
Shortsville, New York 14548

Enclosures: #36;#25

RR/CGM/AVH/SEVpt--

✓ cc: John Rogers



Feb. 18, 1982

President Reagan,

The first time I saw you on tv
I wanted you for the

president. When I heard
you were president

I ran to tell my Mom and

Dad. When you got shot I felt

bad, but when you got out
of the hospital I felt good
inside. Some times I

play like I'm you. I try to
comb my hair like you. You
are doing a good job

for the coun try. I hope you
read my letter. Once I saw

Your airplane in California,

I hope you are president for a
long time.

Sincerely,

LaMar Christensen

Box 474

Ephrata, Utah

84627

May 14, 1982

Dear LaMar:

Thank you for writing. One of the things I enjoy most about the Presidency is hearing from young friends all across the nation.

Your friendship and support are important to me as we work together to strengthen the nation we all love. You have my best wishes now and for the years ahead.

Sincerely,

RONALD REAGAN

LaMar Christensen
Box 474
Ephraim, Utah 84627

cc: Senator Orrin G. Hatch

RR/CGM/SEV/AVH/emu
YP-32

Idolow Texas
January 27 1981

Dear President Reagan,

Hi Mr. Reagan my name is Cliff. Are all the hostages fine. I like your limousine very much. You have a very big house. I bet you will be the best President we ever had next to George Washington. I like you very much. I looked at you the day you were inaugurated. It must be fun living in Washington D. C. I will be nine in February. The 23 of course.

Love Cliff Alexander

Dg

002188

4612

PR 014-01

FEB 11 1981

February 9, 1981

Dear Girls and Boys:

I want you to know how much your messages meant to me. There is much to do and I count on your help in our efforts to make that new beginning we all desire.

The support of our nation's young people is encouraging to me; in a democracy even the smallest voices are important to the leaders of government. Keep up the good work!

With best wishes always,

Sincerely,

RONALD REAGAN

Pupils of Mrs. Pierson's
Third Grade Class
Room 3C
X Idalou Elementary School
Idalou, Texas 79329

RR/AVH/CGM/emu
YP-I

Childrens Ltrs

004 0 1001



WALTER & LEONORE ANNENBERG
PRESIDENTIAL LEARNING CENTER



Letters to the President

Letters for use in 4-5 classrooms

Received SS
1984 MAY -9 AM 10:36

Andy Smith
400 London Pride Road
Irmo, South Carolina 29063

April 18, 1984

Dear Mr. President,

My name is Andy Smith. I am a seventh grade student at Irmo Middle School, in Irmo, South Carolina.

Today my mother declared my bedroom a disaster area. I would like to request federal funds to hire a crew to clean up my room. I am prepared to provide the initial funds if you will provide matching funds for this project.

I know you will be fair when you consider my request. I will be awaiting your reply.

Sincerely yours,

Andy Smith
Andy Smith

226267

4612

PP 014-01

PP 09803

WE

PP 00502

JV

May 11, 1984

Dear Andy:

I'm sorry to be so late in answering your letter but, as you know, I've been in China and found your letter here upon my return.

Your application for disaster relief has been duly noted but I must point out one technical problem: the authority declaring the disaster is supposed to make the request. In this case, your mother.

However, setting that aside, I'll have to point out the larger problem of available funds. This has been a year of disasters: 539 hurricanes as of May 4th and several more since, numerous floods, forest fires, drought in Texas and a number of earthquakes. What I'm getting at is that funds are dangerously low.

May I make a suggestion? This Administration, believing that government has done many things that could better be done by volunteers at the local level, has sponsored a Private Sector Initiatives Program, calling upon people to practice voluntarism in the solving of a number of local problems.

Your situation appears to be a natural. I'm sure your mother was fully justified in proclaiming your room a disaster. Therefore, you are in an excellent position to launch another volunteer program to go along with the more than 3000 already underway in our nation. Congratulations.

Give my best regards to your mother.

Sincerely,

X

Andy Smith
400 London Pride Road
Irmo, South Carolina 29063

RR:plr 5pmna

HANDWRITING

To Audrey Smith 400 London Pride Rd.
Drama, S.C. Carolina 29053

Dear Audrey

I'm ~~sorry~~ to be so late in answering your letter but as you know I've been in China and found your letter here upon my return.

Your application for disaster relief has been duly noted but I must point out one technical problem; the authority declaring the disaster is supposed to make the request. In this case your mother.

However setting that aside I'll have to point out the larger ~~part~~ problem of available funds. This has been a year of disasters, 539 hurricanes as of May 4th and several more since, numerous floods, forest fires, drought in Texas and a number of earthquakes. What I'm getting at is that funds are dangerously low.

May I make a suggestion? This administration, believing that govt. has done many things that could better be done by volunteers at the local level, has sponsored a Private Sector Initiative Program, calling upon people to practice voluntarism in the solving of a number of local problems.

Your situation appears to be a natural. I'm sure your Mother was fully justified in proclaiming your room a disaster. Therefore you are in an excellent position to launch another volunteer program to go along with the more than 3000 already underway in our nation's congratulations.

Send my best regards to your Mother
Lenny BZ

Dear Mr. President:

I have an idea to help countries avoid war. When two countries are having a war they can play basketball. The winner gets to make the decision about the thing they are arguing about. I think that you are doing a good job.

I like horses and jellybeans like you do.

Your Friends,

Lonnie George

P.O. Box 375

Lone Pine, Calif.
93545

me 7

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT,

I HAVE AN IDEA TO HELP COUNTRIES AVOID WAR. WHEN TWO COUNTRIES ARE HAVING A WAR THEY CAN PLAY BASKETBALL. THE WINNER GETS TO MAKE THE DECISION ABOUT THE THING THEY ARE ARGUING ABOUT.

I THINK THAT YOU ARE DOING A GOOD JOB.

I LIKE HORSES AND JELLYBEANS LIKE YOU DO.

YOUR FRIEND,
LONNIE GEORGE

067203

4612

PR 014-01

1/10/82

RE 002

1/10-5-01

1/10-5-02

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 22, 1982

Dear Lonnie:

I received your letter and want to thank you very much. Thanks, too, for your suggestion about ending war. I don't know whether we can work something like that out. You know, there are some countries where they don't play basketball. But, I promise you, I'm going to do everything I can to see that we have peace.

Thanks for your picture with that nice looking horse.

Best regards,

Ronald Reagan

Master Lonnie George
Post Office Box 546
Lone Pine, California 93545

820322

Reference to the letter in

To Lonnie - With Very Best Wishes
Ronald Reagan

HANDWRITING FILE

To Lonnie George P.O. Box 546 Lone Pine Calif.

93545

Dear Lonnie

I received your letter and want to thank you very much. Thanks too for your suggestion about ending war. I don't know whether we can work something like that out. You know there are some countries where they don't play basket ball. But I promise you I'm going to do everything I can to see that we have peace.

Thanks for your picture with that nice looking house.

Best Regards
RR

3

Can we send him a picture of me in house load with our letter?

March 22, 1982

Dear Lonnie:

I received your letter and want to thank you very much. Thanks, too, for your suggestion about ending war. I don't know whether we can work something like that out. You know, there are some countries where they don't play basketball. But, I promise you, I'm going to do everything I can to see that we have peace.

Thanks for your picture with that nice looking horse.

Best regards,

S/ RR

Master Lonnie George
Post Office Box 546
Lone Pine, California 93545

RR:AVH:pps

RR Dictation

Encl: RR Photo

911 Brentwood Dr.
Lake Villa, Ill.
60046
Nov. 18, 1980

President elect - Ronald Reagan
c/o The White House
Washington D.C.

Dear Mr. Reagan:

Hello my name is Julie Wessel. I have blondish hair. I'm 11 years old. I have 6 cats, a dog, and a bird. I love animals! When you become president in January do you think you can please try to do something for the little baby seals in Canada! It's so cruel, what they do to them! When I get older I'm going to be a veterinarian.

Do you think you can lower the taxes a little or at least try! And maybe even the prices? The cost of living these days is very high! We manage pretty good, but every once in awhile there are things we would like to do, or get something, but we can't because it's too expensive or we don't have any money. For instance I want a pair of Calvin Klein jeans but #34 or #35 is a little expensive.

We voted for you we think you'll be a good prez.

Yours, Truly
Julie
Wessel

41330 Lincoln Dr.
Antioch Illinois 60002
Nov. 20, 1980

President-elect Ronald Reagan
% The White House
Washington D.C.

Dear President-elect Reagan:

I think you should try harder than Carter to get the hostages out. But still try to get the inflation down from fifteen percent to five. For instance when Ford was in office gas cost 76¢ now that Carter is in office gas has gone up to \$1.76. So I'm hopping you will lower it back to 76¢ per gallon than a \$1.76 per gallon.

P.S. Congratulations on your victory over Carter and Anderson.

Sincerely Yours
Wayne Trapp

4
YA-1

Antioch Upper Grade
800 Highview Drive
Antioch, IL 60002

President Ronald Reagan
The White House
Washington D.C. 20515

003242

Dear President Reagan:

I am a sixth grade English teacher. As part of a lesson on writing business letters, I asked my students to write letters to you, our new president, in order to share their observations and opinions with you.

Although my students are only eleven years old, their concerns are genuine, and they are quite aware of many of the conflicts in our world. Yet, as you will see from their letters, they are also full of hope for the future and confidence in your ability to lead us. I share their optimism.

I hope you enjoy the letters. Best wishes. We are all behind you.

Sincerely,



Penelope A. LeFew

February 12, 1981

003242

4612

FG, PR 014-01

Dear Girls and Boys:

Thank you for the generous support you expressed in your letters.

I encourage you to watch for news on how policy develops in those areas of special interest to you. In this way, you will best learn answers to the many questions you raised about the direction of the new Administration.

Your views are a welcome message that you care about the welfare of America. I hope that you will always involve yourselves as concerned citizens dedicated to the progress of our country.

With my best wishes always,

Sincerely,

RONALD REAGAN

Pupils of Miss LeFew's
Sixth Grade Class
X Antioch Upper Grade School
800 Highview Drive
Antioch, Illinois 60002

✓ Enclosure: Inaugural Address

RR/AVH/gjc
YP-4

10

Children's Letters

810212