

# Advocacy Through Letter Writing

## Summary

Students will develop an advocacy plan for a local, national or global health problem. Students will write a letter as part of their advocacy plan.

This lesson is written as an interdisciplinary unit for both the Health and Language Arts classrooms. It can however, be taught in just one of the classes.

## Main Core Tie

Health Education II (9-12)

[Strand 2: MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH \(MEH\) Standard HII.MEH.6](#)

## Time Frame

4 class periods of 45 minutes each

## Group Size

Small Groups

## Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Communication, Social & Civic Responsibility

## Materials

Copies or an overhead transparency of "[Sun Maid or Sun Mad?](#)" (scroll to p. 60)

Large sheet of butcher paper for each class

Markers

Copy of "Advocacy Plan" for each student

Pen or pencil for each student

Computer Lab and Internet access (optional)

Copy of "Peer Editing Sheet for Letter of Advocacy" for each student

## Background for Teachers

Familiarity with examples of local, national and/or global advocacy.

Knowledge of the format of a business letter/letter of complaint.

## Student Prior Knowledge

Experience with letter writing, peer editing and word processing (if computers are used.)

## Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will identify health issues that affect individuals and/or families.

Students will develop a variety of advocacy skills, including letter writing.

Students will use revision strategies to improve a written draft as well as editing text to conform to the conventions of standard English.

Students will predict the effect of their advocacy plan.

## Instructional Procedures

**DAYS 1 - 3**

(Health class)

## **Examples of Advocacy**

Option A: Describe for the class, a local, national or global example of advocating for the health of self and others.

Option B: Use the following information and web sites listed in Background for Teachers to describe the 1965 California farm workers' strike.

Distribute a copy of "Sun Maid or Sun Mad?" to each student or show the class the overhead transparency. Use the questions provided along with the pictures:

Look at both pictures, studying them for detail.

What are some of the things you see?

What messages are the artists trying to communicate?

Why do you think Ester Hernandez picked this particular package cover to make into a calavera (skeleton)?

Explain the California Farm Workers' Strike and the ensuing consumer boycott. Describe some of the reasons the farmers were striking; e.g., low wages, toxic pesticides, horrible working conditions, etc.

Go on to relate some of the successful strategies used by Cesar Chavez and the farm workers:

roving pickets (different fields each day)

refusing a 20 cent raise; holding out for the establishment of a union

asking consumers to join in the boycott

contacting unions, churches and other community organizations to join in handing out literature in front of stores selling grapes

marching almost 300 miles in 25 days to Sacramento, culminating in a rally with thousands of people and media coverage

And The Results?

Workers were allowed to elect their own union representative and were provided a union shop.

Workers also received a base pay of \$1.65/hr, a week of paid vacation and standby pay if no work was available. Years later, workers were provided a health clinic, health plan, credit union, community center and a cooperative gas station.

## **Brainstorming For Change**

Ask students to brainstorm things at school, in the community, state and nation that affect people's physical, mental, emotional and/or social health in a negative way. Student responses may include everything from cafeteria food, to a near-by polluted river, to the deplorable conditions of sweat shops in Mexico and other countries. Record the answers on a large sheet of butcher paper.

## **Taking Action**

As a class, in small groups or individually, create an advocacy plan for one of the health issues on the list.

Distribute a copy of the Advocacy Plan to each student for completion. At this time, go over any unfamiliar terms; e.g., petition, hand bills/literature, lobbying, press release, etc.

Ask students to identify a person, in authority, to whom they can write a letter which addresses the selected health problem (students may need to use phone books, make phone calls or use the internet to determine this information along with a mailing or email address.)

Over the next few days, students will continue to work on their advocacy plan\* in Health class while they focus on the letter writing component in the Language Arts classroom. Students may wish to work on the plan outside of class, collecting signatures, searching for information online, etc.

**DAYS 2 - 4** (Language Arts Class)

## **Letter Writing**

Review the correct format for a letter of complaint and adapt the body of the letter for advocacy (see Peer Editing Sheet for Letter of Advocacy):

Paragraph 1 explains the problem and provides detail/evidence of the negative affects on your health and/or that of others.

Paragraph 2 proposes a solution and identifies exactly what you want to have happen.

Paragraph 3 ends the letter respectfully, thanking the reader for his/her time and encouraging him/her to take care of the problem.

Instruct students to complete a rough draft of their letter (use computers if available). When the draft is completed, ask class members to trade letters with another student and complete a Peer Editing Sheet for that student's letter.

Based on feedback from the peer edit, students make necessary changes in their final copy.

\*Students are not required to follow through with their action plan (this includes the mailing of the letter). Ask students to predict the outcome of their advocacy plan. Students wishing to follow through with their plans are encouraged to do so.

### Strategies for Diverse Learners

Students work together to create advocacy plans and compose letters of advocacy--requiring only one written copy per group.

Show a film clip which illustrates someone in an advocacy role; e.g., *Ghandi*, *Erin Brockovich*, etc.

### Extensions

Follow through with the advocacy plan.

### Assessment Plan

Students will be assessed on their completed advocacy plan, letter of advocacy and peer editing sheet.

### Rubrics

[Advocacy Plan](#)

### Authors

[Val Murdock](#)