

2017

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL





WRITE FOR RIGHTS 2017 EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

“This was an awesome opportunity to empower students to exercise their rights and their voice.”

– Ms. Allen, High School English/Language Arts Teacher

“Write for Rights is such a great way for students to learn a new writing skill while gaining an appreciation for activism.

My students loved participating!” – Prof. Jones, College English Instructor

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide was created to help you and your students participate in Write for Rights, Amnesty International's global letter writing campaign focusing on individual cases of human rights abuses around the world.

Ten cases—from Bangladesh, Chad, China, Egypt, Finland, Honduras, Israel & Occupied Palestinian Territories, Jamaica, Madagascar and Turkey—are included in this year's Write for Rights. By learning about these individual cases and writing effective letters to help end the violations, your students will learn about human rights, effective letter writing skills and how their words have the power to make a difference around the world.

This guide was created for students aged 13-22 and may be implemented in a single class session, but you may also choose to expand to an in-depth lesson over several days and involve others in your school or community.

CONTENTS

Getting Started	3
Online Resources	3
National Teaching Standards	4
Sample Lesson Plan	4
What are Human Rights? – <i>activity</i>	5
Write for Rights Cases – <i>activity</i>	6
Letter Writing – <i>activity</i>	7
Frequently Asked Questions	9
Additional Activities	9
Supplemental Information	10
Classroom Reporting Form	11
Letter Writing Scaffold	12
Annotated Letter	13

GETTING STARTED

- 1 Sign up as an educator at write.amnestyusa.org/signup.
- 2 Write letters in your classroom using this guide and our online resources at write.amnestyusa.org.
- 3 Send your letters! You have two options for sending in your letters:
 - Mail letters to the address included on each case sheet, and let us know how many you sent by visiting write.amnestyusa.org/report.
 - Mail all letters and the classroom reporting form (page 11 of these guide) in one envelope to Amnesty International USA's office:

Amnesty International USA
Attn: Youth & Student Program
1624 Franklin Avenue, Suite 520
Oakland CA 94612

After letting us know how many letters your students wrote, we will send you back a classroom certificate thanking you and your students for participating in Write for Rights 2017!

QUESTIONS? Email youth@aiusa.org or call (415) 513-1740.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Write for Rights website: write.amnestyusa.org

This year's cases: write.amnestyusa.org/cases

Individual case sheets: write.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CaseSheets.pdf

Sample letters: write.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Write-for-Rights-2017_Case-Letters_.pdf

Write for Rights successes: write.amnestyusa.org/successes/

All downloadable materials: write.amnestyusa.org/downloads

NATIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS

The following is an abbreviated list of teaching standards that correspond with the lessons contained in this guide:

National Council of Teachers of English

- Number 4: Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- Number 11: Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- Number 12: Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

National Council for the Social Studies

- Number 5: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.
- Number 6: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
- Number 9: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.
- Number 10: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.



SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Process	Time
Introduce students to human rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights	15 minutes
Explain Write for Rights, and read through the case sheets as a class or individually	20 minutes
Read through the annotated letter and make note of the effective letter writing tips. Provide letter writing scaffold, if desired	5 minutes
Students write their own letters on two of the cases (or as many as time permits), and a solidarity message for at least one of the cases	25 minutes
Reflection	10 minutes

WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

Objective

- Students gain a basic understanding of human rights
- Students are able to relate the concept of human rights to their own lives

Plan

Use the following prompts to introduce your students to human rights and their individual relationship to this universal concept.

- 1 Explain to your students that each of them have human rights. That every person in the classroom, school, city, and world was born with the same human rights. Human rights are the rights that all people have simply because they are human. These rights are inalienable: they cannot be denied or taken away under any circumstance.

Ask students to take a moment to think about their daily lives. What is an example of a human right that they need or use on a daily basis?

Possible answer: Right to freedom of expression. Tell students that they exercise their right to freedom of expression when they do something as normal as post a thought or opinion online. You may note that they are also right now exercising their right to education!

- 2 Explain that there are documents that teach us about our human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This milestone declaration about human rights was adopted by the United Nations in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the devastation of the Second World War. The UDHR was written when the countries of the world came together to work out how to build peace and advance justice and freedom, to ensure that such atrocities would never happen again. It was the first declaration to clearly establish that the same rights belong equally to every single person.

After the UDHR, additional treaties were adopted by the UN that specifically identified the civil and political rights (such as the right to freedom of speech or religion) as well as the economic, social and cultural rights (such as the right to education, to work and to healthcare) that every person requires to live a life of freedom and dignity.

- 3 Reinforce that human rights protect individuals, and create obligations for governments to take specific actions—negative and positive—to ensure that everyone’s human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled without discrimination. Sometimes governments violate or fail to protect these rights. That is why it’s important for individuals and groups to take peaceful actions to advocate for their rights and the rights of others and to hold governments accountable. You may exercise some of these rights in your life every day without even thinking about it.

Connect back to the freedom of expression example in #1. Around the world, some people are sent to prison for years by their government simply for writing a post on Facebook. Ask students to imagine what it would feel like to be sent to prison for years just for posting a peaceful thought on Facebook.

Emphasize that around the world, and even here at home, people experience violations of their human rights every day.

WRITE FOR RIGHTS CASES

Objective

- Students are introduced to the 2017 Write for Rights cases
- Students make connections between the introduction to human rights and the personal stories of these cases

Plan

Use the following prompts to introduce your students to the idea of Write for Rights, the stories behind this year's cases, and how students can use the power of their words to positively influence these cases.

- 1 Tell students that today they will be learning more through six cases that illustrate violations of human rights happening to real people around the world, and here in the United States. Explain that this is part of a global project happening now through December, and that people around the world of all ages—including students like themselves in dozens of other countries—are learning about these same cases and writing letters of their own to help bring about justice for these individuals.

These letters are important because they will be written to the government officials who have the power to stop the human rights violations in each case. Students will also have the opportunity to write a message of hope to the individuals in the cases directly.

- 2 Distribute the case sheets (found online). Introduce as many of the cases below as desired, paying special attention to any quotes from the individuals on their case sheets in order to illustrate the personal experience of human rights violations. Provide the option to read the case sheets individually.

- 3 Ask students to name some of the specific human rights issues highlighted in the cases. Examples could include:

- Right to freedom of expression
- Right to freedom from torture
- Right to life and freedom from discrimination
- Right to a fair trial
- Forced eviction can encompass a range of human rights violations, including the right to adequate housing, food, water, health, security of the person and freedom of movement

Please see Page 10 for additional information about the right to freedom of expression, freedom from torture and other rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

LETTER WRITING

Objective

- Students understand how their letters can have an impact to help end human rights abuses
- Students understand the components of an effective letter
- Students write two letters and one solidarity message

Plan

Use the case sheets and letter writing materials to empower students to write effective letters for two cases of their choosing, and a solidarity message for one case. Supplemental materials include case sheets and sample letters, a letter-writing scaffold and an annotated letter from a previous Write for Rights case.

- 1 Explain that now that they have learned about these real people who are experiencing violations of their human rights, they are able to use the power of their words to make a difference in their lives.

Tell your students about Write for Rights, and how they can take part by writing letters to officials who have the power to put an end to these abuses. Explain that in addition, they will also be able to write or draw a message directly to the people in these cases (a “solidarity” message) to show that they are not alone and to send a message of hope. Explain that the individuals in these cases actually receive these messages and find strength in them.

“The support I received was so great that I did not feel like I was imprisoned. I did not feel alone, I knew that people believed in me.” – Femi Peters, a former prisoner of conscience who was released after being included in Write for Rights 2010.

Visit write.amnestyusa.org/successes for more success stories!

- 2 **Why does it work?** Explain why their words are more powerful than they might think. Tell your students to imagine that they are one of the government officials that have been identified to have the power to end the abuses in one of the cases. Imagine they are sitting at their desks, and receive one letter about the case. Then 100 letters...then 1,000 letters...then 100,000 letters, all calling for them to put an end to the human rights violations against this individual.

“Your letters, phone calls, and petitions were my protection during the months I spent in solitary confinement. You were my voice when I had none.” – Birtukan Mideksa, a former prisoner of conscience who was released after being included in Write for Rights 2009.

In addition to opening prison doors, letters to officials can improve the conditions for people who are still in prison. As letters begin to flood in, prison authorities realize that there are people around the world who know that this person is imprisoned there and are concerned for his or her wellbeing.

“We could always tell when international protests were taking place...the food rations increased and the beatings were fewer. Letters from abroad were translated and passed around from cell to cell...” – A former prisoner of conscience in Vietnam.

These letters cannot be ignored. By speaking out, we can make change happen through the power of our numbers and voices. Convey that the letters they are about to write help save lives every year—in the past, these letters have freed people in prison for exercising their right to freedom of expression, ensured reparations for survivors of torture, and provided protection for people working to defend the human rights that they have learned about today.

- 3 What makes a good letter?** See the six simple rules below. If desired, distribute sample letters (found online) or the annotated letter (page 13). There is one sample letter for each case and one annotated letter for a Write for Rights case from 2011, marked to explain the effective components of a letter.

Provide the option to review the annotated letter together before students write their own letters. Consider distributing the letter writing scaffold for students to help craft their letters.

Follow six simple rules:

- Always be polite.
- Follow the instructions and information provided, and avoid any mention of religious holidays or politics.
- Let them know who you are, and mention that you are a student.
- If you have a personal connection to the country or issue, feel free to include it. This will show officials that your letter is genuine, and that people around the world are watching their country.
- Emphasize how the person you are writing to has the power to make a difference.
- Be brief—one page at the most. Sometimes just a few well-crafted lines can be most effective.

When writing a letter to people in the cases themselves (called a “solidarity message”) encourage students to consider the power of their words to provide hope. Tell them that the letters need not be long—the aim is for the individuals to feel that people around the globe are thinking about them and offering their support.

“Receiving letters give[s] me real inspiration for what we are doing. I have begun to notice that the world is watching and cheering us—we are not alone. I thank everyone very much for their support.” – Phyo Phyo Aung, student leader and former prisoner of conscience released after being included in Write for Rights 2015.

- 4 Which two cases will you write for today?** Consider posing this question to the class, and calling upon a few students to share what inspires them to write for the cases they selected.

Provide time for the students to write the letters for their selected cases, and a solidarity message for one case of their choosing. Note that students should refer to the case sheet and/or sample letter for their selected cases and that it is important to follow the instructions and information as provided, as it has been carefully researched to be most effective in order to resolve these cases.

If students wish to write more letters or if time is running low, provide the option to finish their letters or write more at home and turn them in during the next class period. If you are using Write for Rights as part of a unit, you may consider offering extra credit for additional letters written.

- 5** Once their letters are complete, allow time for students to reflect on what they have learned and the letters they have written. Consider asking students the following questions to inspire reflection and sharing among the class.

- How has your understanding of human rights changed?
- How did it feel to advocate for another person’s human rights?
- Which case inspired you, and why?
- What human rights abuses exist in our community? In the United States? Around the world?
- What are some other ways you can think of to take action for someone else’s human rights?

If students are interested in getting more involved with Amnesty International USA’s human rights work, provide them with the [Student Group Starter Guide](#), or contact youth@aiusa.org for ideas and resources.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO PARTICIPATE?

All that we require from you as an educator are envelopes and postage. When you send the letters written by your students, you may either mail all in one envelope to the Amnesty office (page 3) or you may send the letters to the appropriate addresses on the case sheets. Within the United States, letters (up to 1 oz.) cost 47 cents each. To all other countries, airmail letters and cards (up to 1 oz.) cost \$1.15 each.

SHOULD MY STUDENTS SIGN THEIR NAMES ON THEIR LETTERS?

It is up to you! It is good to include because it shows the recipient that they are real people who care about the case. If any students are concerned about their own security, they can keep their name off of the letter.

WHEN SHOULD WE WRITE?

Write for Rights officially concludes on Human Rights Day – December 10th – but you are welcome to write letters in your classroom anytime between now and the end of December. Please let us know how many letters you and your students wrote by January 15th, 2018.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS? Email youth@aiusa.org or call (415) 513-1740.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 1 Distribute copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Provide time for students to review the document, and then pose the following questions:
 - Are there any rights in the UDHR that surprise you?
 - Do you disagree with any of the rights included in the UDHR?
 - Which rights do you think are particularly important in your life, and why?
 - What rights do you see protected or violated in your community?
- 2 Organize a school-wide or community letter-writing event on Human Right Day, December 10th. Publicize within the school and invite other classes to participate.
- 3 Organize a competition among classes to see who can write the most letters.
- 4 Invite students to select one case for which they will do further research at home, learning more about the specific human rights issues and additional background information about the countries.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following the Second World War. Since 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system.

The UDHR itself is, as its name states, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world that they will abide by certain basic standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Since its adoption, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up on the basis of its principles. It is these laws and agreements which allow organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments not to engage in the types of behavior or treatment that the people mentioned in these cases have experienced.

Human rights protect individuals, and they create obligations for governments or state officials. They are designed to ensure that every human being, whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity, nationality, ethnic identity or religious beliefs, age, socioeconomic class, whatever their beliefs – that all human beings should be treated with respect for their humanity and dignity. Read more about the UDHR [here](#).

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) addresses freedom of expression. Everyone has the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas without fear or interference. Yet throughout the world, journalists, bloggers and others face harassment and imprisonment for exercising their right to free speech.

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 19, UDHR

While governments generally have not welcomed the prying eye and the biting pen of the investigative reporter, journalists have been increasingly targeted in many countries on account of their professional activities. And yet, freedom of expression is essential to the attainment of all other rights because it provides the space in which to share information about rights, make the public aware of government abuses, and to campaign for those rights. By cracking down on journalists and public discourse, governments seek to restrict the flow of information and diminish the power of the people to act upon the truth. This right is important for the personal development and dignity of every individual and is vital for the fulfillment of other human rights.

FREEDOM FROM TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Article 5 of the UDHR protects our right to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The UN Convention Against Torture defines torture as "...the intentional infliction of severe physical or mental pain or suffering for purposes such as obtaining information or a confession, or punishing, intimidating or coercing someone."

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 5, UDHR

NEED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES?

Contact us if you need additional information on human rights documents or issues, such as prisoners, business practice and human rights, children's rights, or economic, social and cultural rights.



WRITE FOR RIGHTS 2017 – CLASSROOM REPORTING FORM

YOUR NAME _____

THE NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL _____

NUMBER OF CLASSROOM PARTICIPANTS _____

YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS _____

MAILING ADDRESS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM _____

WOULD YOU LIKE A WRITE FOR RIGHTS CLASSROOM CERTIFICATE?

COMMENTS (We value your feedback!) _____

Mail to:

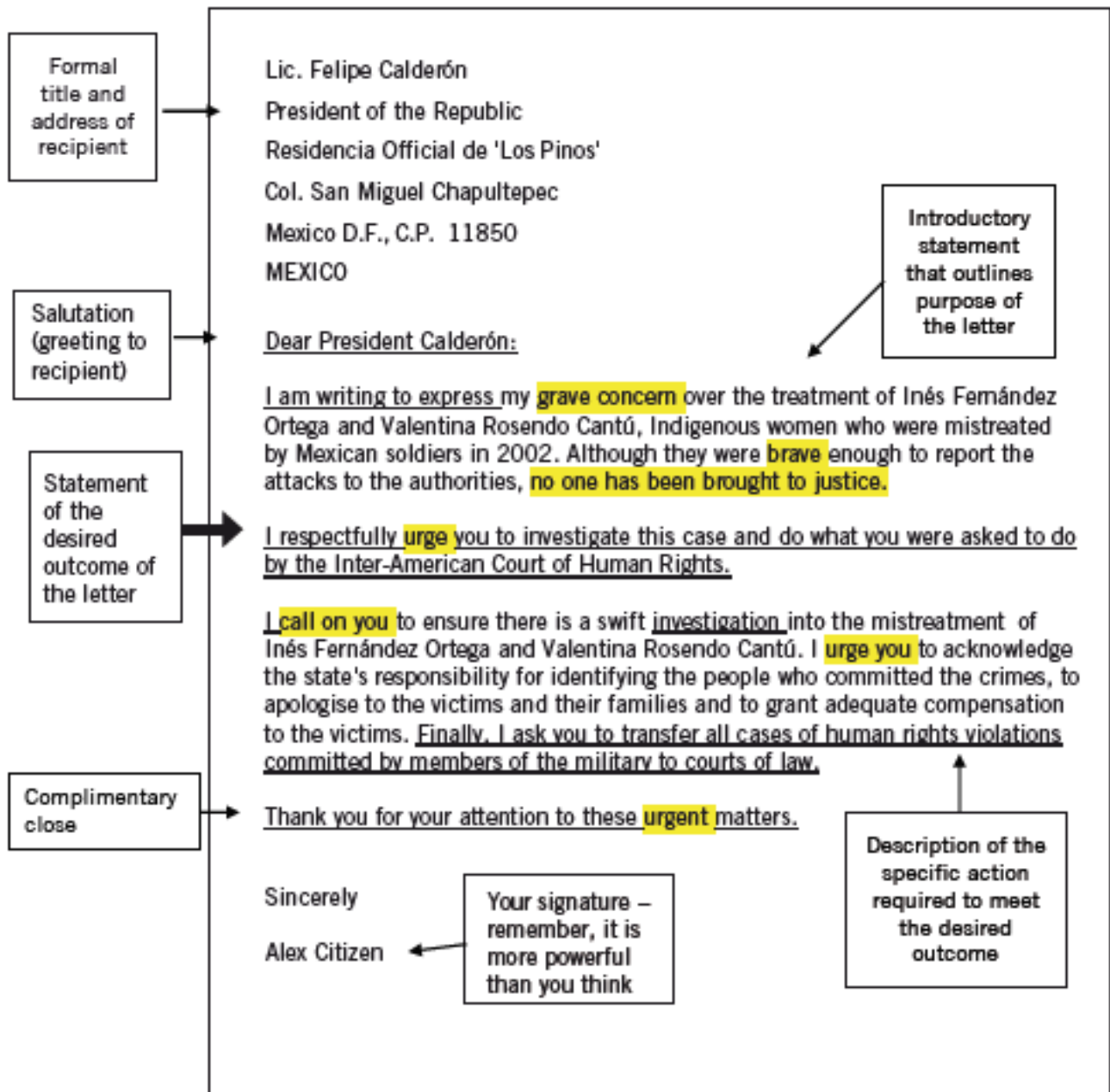
Amnesty International USA
Attn: Youth & Student Program
1624 Franklin Avenue, Suite 520
Oakland CA 94612

Thank you for Writing for Rights!

LETTER WRITING SCAFFOLD

Recipient's title and address	
The salutation (greeting to the recipient)	
Introductory statement that outlines the purpose of the letter	
Statement of the desired outcome of the letter	
Description of the specific action required to meet the desired outcome	
The complimentary close (short and polite remark to end the letter)	
Your signature	

ANNOTATED LETTER



KEY
... = Strong emotive language
President = Formal respectful language