



Lesson: Writing Persuasive Letters to Historic Figures

STANDARDS: California

Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills: Chronological and Spatial Thinking

3. Students explain how the present is connected to the past, identifying both similarities and differences between the two, and how some things change over time and some things stay the same.

Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills: Historical Interpretation

1. Students summarize the key events of the era they are studying and explain the historical contexts of those events.
2. Students identify the human and physical characteristics of the places they are studying and explain how those features form the unique character of those places.
3. Students identify and interpret the multiple causes and effects of historical events.
- 5.4 Students understand the political, religious, social, and economic institutions that evolved in the colonial era.
- 2.4 Write [persuasive](#) letters or compositions:
 - a. State a clear position in support of a proposal.
 - b. Support a position with relevant evidence.
 - c. Follow a simple organizational pattern.
 - d. Address reader concerns.

Analysis and Evaluation of Oral and Media Communications

- 1.7 Identify, analyze, and critique persuasive techniques (e.g., promises, dares, flattery, glittering generalities); identify logical fallacies used in oral presentations and media messages.

Literacy: Constructing Persuasive Essays

Motivation: Ask students to name some people they admire in the performing arts. What were those people like in fifth grade? How did they get to be so accomplished in their field? What do you think are some personal qualities of successful artists and musicians?

Group Activity: Watch the three sections of *Wynton in Jazz with Wynton Marsalis*. Tell students to take notes on the points Wynton is trying to make. What is he trying to convince students to believe? For example, why did he tell the story about not wanting to



ruin his lips? Why does he feel practicing is important? Why does he feel classical music is educational? Ask students to also list counterarguments. This could be done in a graphic organizer like so:

Question	Argument	Counter Argument
Why should I practice?	Wynton eventually found out that if he kept repeating things over and over again and working on his weak spots, he would improve	Wynton thought his teachers weren't teaching him anything because he already knew how to practice

Ask the students if they face the same difficulties as Wynton when it comes to practicing something. Do they think other composers had the same problems? Did they feel Wynton was convincing? Why or why not?

Independent Activity: Ask students to write [persuasive letters](#) to historical figures that were alive during the colonial era. These historical figures do not have to be famous; in fact, making them every day people is an excellent chance to explore some social history with the students. The letters should persuade these historical figures to do something they may not necessarily want to do, but that students feel would be beneficial for the figures' lives. Students should present arguments and counterarguments. Students should keep the following criteria in mind while composing their letter:

- 1) What is going on during this time period and how does this historical figure fit into this greater picture? What challenges does this historical figure face in daily life? What challenges does this historical figure face more broadly?
- 2) What is something this historical figure may not want to do that they probably have to do to survive? For example, do they have to learn to ride a horse but they are afraid of horses? Do they have to learn how to sew but they find sewing boring?
- 3) What are some reasons why this figure should do what they are reluctant to do? What are some reasons why they don't do it already?

This activity can be presented in a variety of contexts and situations. Students could present their pieces orally or could hand them in as reports.